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*Virginia Military Institute
Head Coach Scott Wachenheim*



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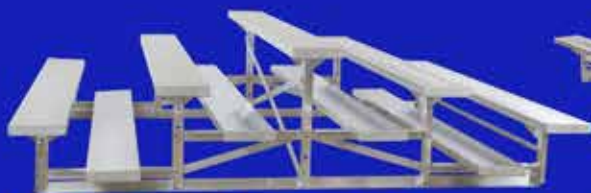
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Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit represent the story of a small, family-owned business, reinvesting in the local community and providing premium-quality Made-In-America uniforms for athletic programs across the country.

But how does this quintessential David stack up against the Goliaths of the uniform industry? How can they possibly compete and compare? If you ask the dealers and sales representatives responsible for keeping teams supplied with uniforms year-in and year-out – there is no comparison. For Allen Reynolds, Sales Manager at Cook's Sporting Goods, Sand Knit and Ripon Athletic is his first choice, and the uniform he leads with in conversations with his customers.

"When we meet with customers, we pull out Ripon Athletic first," Reynolds says.

Don Leonard, President of Crown Sports Sales, Inc. and an advisory council member for the National Sporting Goods Association, echoes Reynolds' sentiments.

"When I sit down with a school, I tell the Ripon Athletic story," Leonard says. "From Hank [Derleth, Ripon Athletic founder], to Sand Knit, to buying the buildings they operate in, to putting the people of Berlin, Wis. back to work – it's just a great American story."

Ripon Athletic doesn't rest on the image and reputation associated with their brand alone. The company constantly strives to perfect their process and products. They invest in relationships, not logos or slogans. Inside the walls of 290 Junction St. in Berlin, Wis. – the global headquarters of Sand Knit and Ripon Athletic – they have been blessed with a staff of loyal, hardworking and invested people. Likewise, the dealers and independent representatives that comprise the Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit family outside those walls, you'll be hard pressed to find anyone who doesn't respect what they do.

"There's not a better group to work with out there," Leonard says. "They really put the 'family' in family business. We've been to Hank's house. We've been to Peter [Derleth]'s house. We've gone to Packers games together. For them, it is all about building a relationship."

"Peter and I are fairly close in age and we're doing the same thing now that my dad and Hank did over 30 years ago," Reynolds adds. "When I think of the Derleths and Ripon Athletic, it is truly family."

"Still today, people buy from people in our industry, and relationships are 3000 percent of our business. At Cook's, we represent Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit by telling their story. I tell my reps, 'We aren't order takers. We are salesmen. We aren't just showing them a product. We are telling them the story.'"

Chip McErlane, a 45-year independent sales representative in the sporting goods industry, says the relationship Ripon Athletic and Sand

Knit have built with their dealers over the years hinges on their unparalleled ability to be there for the end customers. McErlane recalls a time during his career when 75 high schools he represented were wearing Ripon Athletic uniforms in the same state. Yet, somehow, Ripon Athletic delivered the same quality and service for everyone.

"Ripon Athletic came through every time," McErlane recalls. "I can't remember a time when a school didn't have their uniforms. Through hard work, Luke [Ott] and Peter, they came through for the dealer. Every year. 75 high schools all wearing Ripon uniforms? That's big."

What's even more impressive is how Ripon Athletic delivers for the end customers. They treat them as part of that same extended family. They really do say "yes" to jobs no matter how big or how small, and you can always count on getting a real person on the phone when you need something. Pulling all of that off isn't just impressive, it's awe-inspiring.

"It's all a part of the Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit experience," Leonard explains. "We have schools that get a fill-in jersey from us that they can't get from marketing companies, and once they get the Ripon uniforms they're going, 'Man, this is a whole lot nicer than what we have.'"

When schools invest in Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit uniforms, they not only invest in a company that cares, but they also invest in a superior product. Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit can service the needs of those who want a more disposable, one-and-done type of uniform, but prefer to cut and sew jerseys and pants that can survive four years of varsity abuse, followed by four years of JV, and still hold up for four years as practice uniforms.

"I've seen a lot of junk. There is no comparison," McErlane says. "It's worth the money. Working with the dealer and seeing their eyes light up when they ask, 'You can do that?' and we would reply, 'Yes, we can.'"

From being American made, to their sincere interest in serving others, to their continual research and development, innovation and experimentation all housed under one roof, to their professional pedigree and unparalleled quality – the list of "little things" Ripon Athletic and Sand Knit offers places them in a class of their own.

"When you explain all the little things Ripon Athletic does, and how they treat you like family, it becomes a no-brainer," Reynolds says. "Then when you actually get the players in the uniforms, they never want to wear anything else."

To learn more about Ripon Athletic's 100-year anniversary celebration of Sand Knit, visit RiponAthletic.com, or facebook.com/OfficialRiponAthletic.SandKnit.RiponJackets.



Photo: VMI Athletic Communications

Perseverance & Grit

Virginia Military Institute head coach Scott Wachenheim led his program to its first FCS ranking and its first appearance in the FCS playoffs, two of many accomplishments for the Keydets during the spring 2021 season.

By Paul Markgraff

While 2021 is shaping up to be a year that many will love to leave behind, the 2021 spring football season was one to remember for Scott Wachenheim and his Virginia Military Institute Keydets. As head coach for VMI, Wachenheim and his staff made huge strides for his program and raised the standard even higher for an institution renowned for its ability to produce and develop leadership skills at the highest levels.

Wachenheim was named the 2021 Spring AFCA FCS National Coach of the Year. He was selected by a vote of the Active AFCA members at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) schools. The AFCA has named a Coach of the Year since 1935.

He earned his first AFCA national honor by guiding VMI to a 6-2 record, the program's first Southern Conference title since 1977 and its first-ever playoff appearance. The spring 2021 season was the Keydets' first winning campaign since 1981 and the team earned its first national ranking since joining the FCS ranks in 1982. VMI was ranked in every AFCA FCS Top 25 poll during spring 2021, with a high of No. 10 on March 30.

Wachenheim began his coaching career in 1984 at Air Force after a four-year playing career. He was the offensive coordinator on the academy's junior varsity squad before active-duty commitment took him away from coaching. Wachenheim returned to coaching in 1989 as an assistant at Arkansas under his former head coach, Ken Hatfield. He spent two seasons with the Razorbacks before joining the Colorado staff for one year. Wachenheim rejoined Hatfield at Rice from 1994 to 2005, serving as the Owls' offensive coordinator his last five seasons.

Wachenheim joined the Liberty football program in 2006 and served as the offensive coordinator and offensive line coach

for three years before making the jump to the NFL as tight ends coach at Washington in 2009. He returned to college football at Virginia in 2010, serving as offensive line coach his last four years before being named head coach at VMI in 2015.

"We went out and made history together last season, and it really is what Virginia Military Institute is all about: overcoming adversity through perseverance and grit," says Wachenheim. "It gives me a sense of pride because we really did start from the bottom with an 0-11 record in season three. That led to a lot of research on my part, because my original vision for winning wasn't getting it done at VMI. And so I had to ask the question: How do we move forward?"

The first puzzle piece Wachenheim needed to identify was how to instill a culture within the program that was driven by players instead of the coaches. It's an easy thing to say, but not so easy to implement. How could he develop a culture in which players felt ownership?

The second piece of the puzzle was to find and develop offensive, defensive and special teams systems that fit the players available to him. With two-thirds of the team coming from the state of Virginia, he needed to understand which offensive and defensive systems might be attractive to players coming from that state.

The final piece of the puzzle was to find personnel. How could he find and recruit better, more talented players in a region loaded with highly recruited talent at an institution that was more academically demanding than the vast majority of universities out there.

"It meant a lot to us that we put together this plan and our players stepped up and made big-time plays when it counted," he says. "It's always nice to see a vision come to fruition."

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“You either have to do the same things better than everyone else, or you have to do them differently. After year three, I looked around our league, and we were primarily a running league ... We just had to do something different.”



Photo: VMI Athletic Communications

Player-Driven Culture

Perhaps the greatest unknown element in this new system was developing the player-driven culture. First of all, the word “culture” — like the word “family” — is so widely used among coaches, and it means so many different things, that it can lose its essence when it is needed most.

Wachenheim spent the early part of his career working for men like Ken Hatfield, Bill McCartney and Danny Rocco, all highly successful coaches in their own right and outstanding mentors from which to learn. But in many cases, their cultures were driven by the coaches.

“They had coach-led culture that took over the team, and those teams succeeded,” says Wachenheim. “I came into Virginia Military Institute with the things I learned from Coach Hatfield, Coach McCartney and Coach Rocco, and I instilled those values. But I didn’t feel after year three that we had complete team buy-in.”

Wachenheim is quick to explain that this is in no way a judgement on those coaches’ approach to the game, but rather on his ability to achieve buy-in.

“Then I read a book called *Culture Defeats Strategy*,” says Wachenheim. The book was written by recently retired North Forney (Texas) High School head coach Randy Jackson. “The biggest takeaway I got from it was that when coaching the modern athlete, the player has to be part of the culture if you’re going to get 100 percent buy-in.”

So Wachenheim and his staff set off down that road and came up with a player-led mission statement, which was “10 Toes Down.”

“We came up with the three core values: grit, brotherhood and purpose,” he says. “That was a huge driving force in implementing change. For us, 10 Toes Down means to be alert. Encourage yourself and your teammates. Hold yourself and your teammates accountable. The second thing it means to me is to stand firm. We want to have guys that will stand firm in their faith and be willing to defend their faith, whatever their faith is.

Third was to act like men, which fits well at VMI. Real men are men of honor. Men treat women with dignity and respect. Men say, “Yes sir,” “No sir,” “Please,” and “Thank You.”

The fourth element of 10 Toes Down was to be strong. Life is tough. VMI is tough. Winning football games is tough. They would be strong; they wouldn’t back down. They’d persevere with grit and determination.

“The last thing — which was the most important thing, which really exemplified our team last season — was to do everything with love,” says Wachenheim. “I think we had an advantage playing in the spring during the COVID era, because a lot of our young men choose to come to VMI to play football and get a great degree — a top 50 education and military leadership training — but they really wanted to come and play Division I football. Our guys really wanted to play, and through all of the adversity, the love for each other really grew, and we could see it pan out as the season went on.”

Selecting Scheme

From an offensive and defensive standpoint, Wachenheim needed to identify systems that lent themselves to what players already knew a little about.

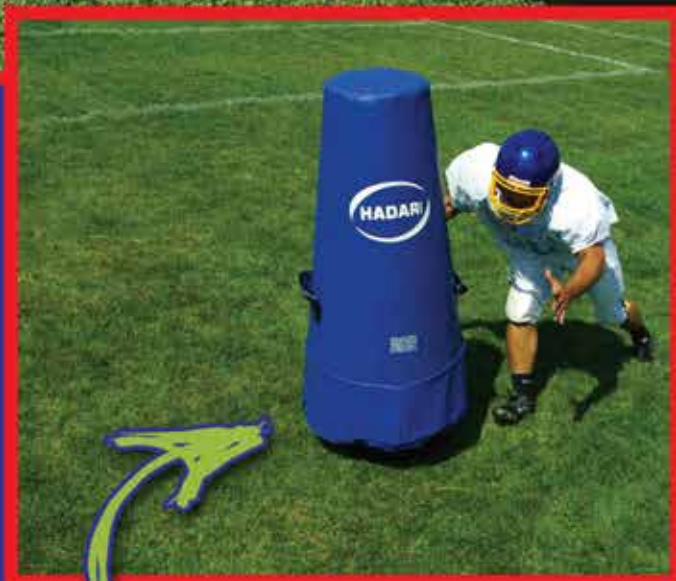
“A long time ago, Coach Hatfield taught me that you either have to do the same things better than everyone else, or you have to do them differently,” says Wachenheim. “After year three, I looked around our league, and we were primarily a running league. There was a lot of option football at the time with The Citadel, Wofford and Furman. We just had to do something different.”

Wachenheim chose an Air Raid style of offense, and it paid dividends. Not only is it much easier to recruit slot receivers than it is to recruit wishbone backs, but in the current era of football, it’s much easier to find quarterbacks who are elusive, fast runners and also accurate passers.

Defensively, the program approached it the same way. Initially, Wachenheim used a defensive style that worked well



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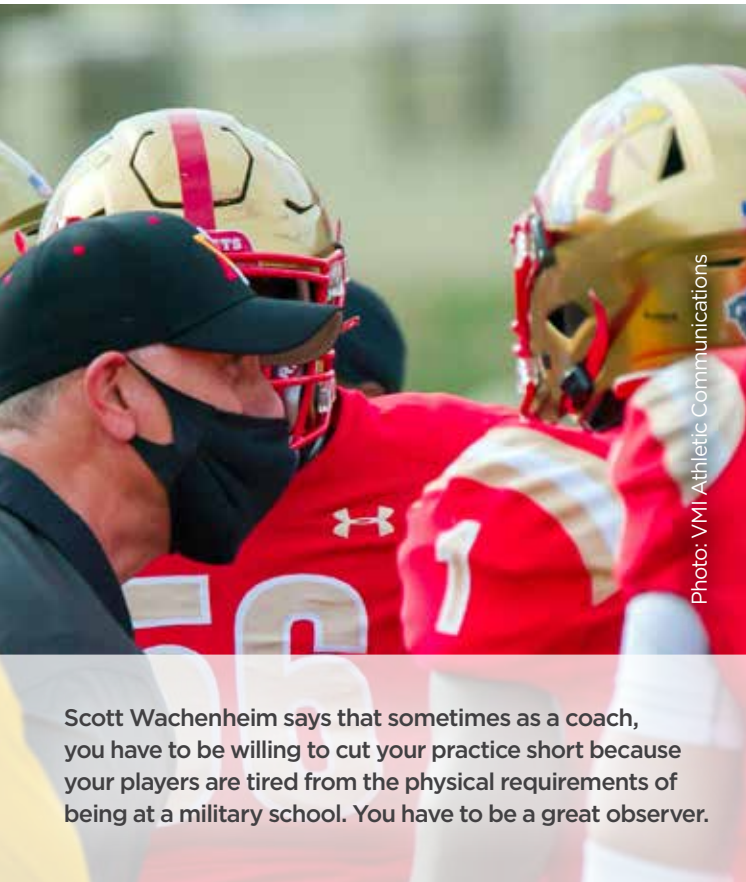


Photo: VMI Athletic Communications

Scott Wachenheim says that sometimes as a coach, you have to be willing to cut your practice short because your players are tired from the physical requirements of being at a military school. You have to be a great observer.

for one of his former colleagues at Liberty University, but it never really clicked at VMI. He learned that he was able to achieve a similar level of success using a different defense and player type available to be recruited to VMI.

“We decided to be an aggressive, blitzing press-man defensive unit, and that paid dividends,” he says. “It’s an exciting defense to play in, and that helped us recruit young men that wanted to play that kind of defense.

“Those were the biggest schematic changes we made, changes that passed through to fit the culture. We changed systems that we ran on offense and defense to fit the style of the young men we could recruit and be different from the rest of our league.”

The Right Man For The Job

For every team in the league, recruiting became significantly challenging over the past two years. The era of COVID introduced us to technology like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and while it definitely showcased what those technologies are capable of, it also highlighted their extensive limitations.

In a game that demands one-to-one contact between player and coach, recruiting over computer monitor and handheld device removed the personality from the equation.

“It was even harder in a COVID environment because we didn’t get to go the high schools; we didn’t get to see the rival high schools or sit in living rooms. We did everything on the phone, via social media, via Zoom or Microsoft teams,” says Wachenheim. “So for this year’s recruiting class, that was difficult.”

As in-person recruiting becomes the norm again, Wachenheim says he will use some tried-and-true approaches that deliver results when selecting appropriate personnel.

“When I was in Houston, Texas, for 12 years at Rice University, I learned this,” he says. “You can ask a high school coach about a young man, but as Coach Hatfield used to joke, the only two people that will exaggerate a young man’s abilities are his high school coach and his mom. He used to tell me when I was recruiting to also ask any random person in the hall, ask somebody at the front office or ask someone in the registrar’s office what this young man is like, and you’re more likely to get a true answer.”

At the same time, if a coach recommends a young man, Wachenheim likes to find a high school team that competes against the young man and ask the coaches if they know him.

“Especially if he runs track,” says Wachenheim. “If a rival high school track coach has been to a track meet where that young man is competing, odds are he knows him. At a track meet, athletes spend a lot of time there to run just one or two events. You learn a lot about people when you sit there and watch.”


Wachenheim is the first to admit that he and his staff aren’t really 100 percent correct in their assessments, but after getting a variety of opinions from folks who aren’t specifically tied to the football program, if he hears positive feedback, he knows he’s got a pretty good person he’s dealing with.

Walking The Talk

Still, assessments without prior knowledge are just words that may bear little — if any — connection to reality. And culture — like assessments — amounts to just so many words if there’s nothing there to back it up. It’s why Wachenheim and his staff do the work to understand their players and support them once they arrive at VMI.

“You have to coach these guys with a different sort of demeanor,” he says. “It’s not that you don’t push them and don’t encourage them. It’s not that you don’t coach them hard. You do. But you also have to make sure they know you love them. Our kids are under high levels of stress: football stress, academic stress, military stress. And we have to get done in practice in 1.5 hours what other schools get done in 2 hours.

“You have to have a sense for what happened in a young man’s day before he steps in the meeting room or on the practice field, because he may need a pat on the back or he may need to know everything’s going to be alright. We intentionally make our practices more fun because of that. We play music, we practice fast and we have energy. I know lots of coaches do that, but we need to be purposeful about it. And then, sometimes as a coach, you have to be willing to cut your practice short because your players are tired from the physical requirements of being at a military school. You have to be a great observer, and if I see a tired football team out there, I’m going to cut the practice down and start shaving minutes off of team period and individual period and make sure we’re fresh for kickoff.”

Sometimes when things don’t go to plan, the first place to look is in the mirror. After a dismal record in the fall of 2019, Wachenheim and his staff did just that, and now they’ve set themselves on a path to sustained progress. And they’re getting better every day. 



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The Price And Reward Of Failure

For Michael Christensen, twice is nice at Carson High School. The longtime high school football coach returned to Carson in 2021 to take over a team in need, and he couldn't be happier.

By Michael Austin

When Michael Christensen arrived for his second stint as Carson High School (Calif.) football coach, it was just weeks prior to the start of the 2021 season ... and only eight players were on the roster.

By the time the season started, he had 28 roster-eligible players, a small coaching staff including one assistant who lives nearly six hours away in Oakland and a sense Carson was trending back in the direction of when he first coached there. From 2006-2009, his Carson team went 38-14 and won two league titles. After three other head-coaching stops since then, he's returned to the place he's most comfortable and a place that desperately needs him.

"When Carson approached me, it was a no-brainer. It's a tough situation but I love the people and the community, so I decided to go back," Christensen explains. "It's the right situation for me to contribute and to help, so I felt compelled to do it.

"Some of those eight kids never had even played football before. This was about as close to starting a new program as there is. I always was intrigued with starting things the way I want."

Establish Structure, Get Experience

Christensen knew he needed to establish his structured coaching style immediately, so as word spread that Carson football needed players, those teenagers would know the commitment required.

"I believe the players have responsibilities. They need to be committed. I provide them with routine and structure.

Nowadays, that's what a lot of kids lack. They need that structure to rely and lean on," Christensen says. "They know if they skip a practice, then they won't play."

While on the surface it may sound as if Christensen is discouraging players by having hard rules, the opposite is true. He finds high-school-age people want structure. They want expectations placed upon them. They want someone who believes they can meet those expectations.

Christensen says he doesn't make it easy on them. Practices aren't set up for them to get easy wins. The Friday night games are tough for a team with no experience and small numbers. Failure is part of life, well beyond the football field. He uses the sport to show players how to build resiliency.

"Football is never going to be easy. It's always going to be a tough game to play. That's what draws people to it. They want to see what they can accomplish and what their limits are," he adds. "But, you have to do it in an environment where they feel supported. Even when they do fail, it's OK. They need to know that. Failure is part of life. It's how you react to it and learn from it."

As the initial players talked to their friends about the program, more people joined. And while 28 is a much healthier roster than eight ... no one in the Carson program had any varsity experience heading into the first game of 2021. Christensen needed players to get reps.

There was no spring football. There was no offseason conditioning. No one was working on fundamentals in the

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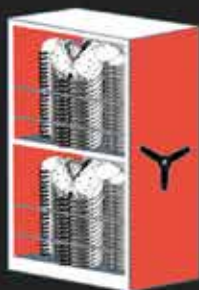
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AFCA Influences Success

Michael Christensen, the head coach at Carson High School (Calif.) has more than 35 years of experience in the football-coaching business, but he admits he doesn't know it all. He's constantly looking at ways to get better, learn more and improve his program. He credits the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) and the AFCA Convention as key influences in his career.

An assistant coach took him to his first AFCA Convention in Anaheim about 20 years ago and, Christensen says, "I fell in love."

He loves the camaraderie and the willingness of coaches to share. It inspired him to get involved and give back to the game. He has served on (and chaired) the AFCA High School Committee for years.

"Coaching has made such a vast impact on my life. I wanted to provide that to others," he says. "It's a great fit for me. I love to learn. I love the sport."

He calls the AFCA Convention "the clinic of all clinics," and the networking he's done there has enhanced his personal and professional relationships with coaches around the country. Christensen says he's even played away games in other states against coaches he originally met at the convention.

summer. As a 35-year coaching veteran, Christensen had to adapt to what his players could — and more times than not — could not do. He constantly looks for ways to place players in a position to find success.

Bluntly, he says, "We can't throw." So the offense has been forced to be more creative in run formations and executing the running game. Christensen mentions the backup quarterback is a tiny 5-foot-5 guy, so he made him the holder on field goals and extra points. Now that player has a role and a way to contribute. He also mentions he had a freshman on punt coverage who was outmatched one week. The other team ran his way and scored easily. He failed. But he learned a lesson.

"Now he learned why we go in the weight room. This is why we need to get bigger and stronger. So he has the ability to take that lesson and make it a positive."

Support Staff Critical To Success

If overcoming just eight rostered players isn't hard enough, think about how many good assistant coaches are available just a couple weeks prior to the season. It's a small pool and Christensen says he needs just the right fit, even though he believes finding quality assistants is harder now than it's ever been.

"Especially in the L.A. City Section, assistants aren't compensated well. It's not really worth their time (from a monetary standpoint). They're going to spend more money on gas than they will get from the stipend," Christensen

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says. “Anybody that is going to assist, is doing it simply because they love the kids.”

His assistants must be open-minded, smart enough to learn whatever system they need to play based on talent, energetic, hopefully have experience and, most importantly, are reliable. Christensen has to depend on his assistants day-in, day-out and players have to trust assistants will be there for them. Not knowing if an assistant will be there on a daily basis does not work in this type of situation.

Christensen has three assistants, including the aforementioned former player and coach who lives in Oakland. It’s not common to have an assistant coach who resides close to six hours north of where you are. But, Carson is not a common football situation right now.

“He does all my film breakdown. He knows my system, my terminology and knows what I’m looking for,” Christensen says, while adding the coach is moving south to be with the team next year. “For this year, I told him, ‘I need you to do this. I don’t have anyone else.’ For us, that film breakdown is extremely important, so I needed someone that I can rely on.”

New Respect For Off-Campus Coaches

Having an assistant coach so far away definitely is a unique situation. Christensen says he never was a fan of off-campus coaches (or as he calls them, “walk-on coaches”), but he’s had a change of heart at Carson, probably because he now is one of those coaches.


He remains teaching at a different school, so his time on the Carson campus is more limited than his previous stop as leader of the football program. Surprisingly, it’s working for him.

“I had been adamant throughout my career about walk-on coaches and how it doesn’t work. But, I’m finding it refreshing,” Christensen admits. “I’m leaving one environment and going into another one where all I need to worry about is football. I don’t need to worry about the teaching part or the faculty meetings.

“For me, it’s been reenergizing. The teachers have my cell number. I know a lot of them from coaching here before. If there is a problem, they call me.”

Christensen is hoping for fewer problems, more players and a return to the former days of Carson football. He admits this second go-round with the Colts is more difficult due to such a low talent base and the sheer number of players who have transferred away the last few years. The first time he coached Carson, he was looking at 148 players the first day. (He kept 35 on varsity after initial grade checks and dispersing players to junior varsity.)

On the flip side, he loves the community, the school and the people.

“We were really successful here before,” he says. “It’s a great community. I know we can get back on the right track again. 

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Photo: VMI Athletics Communications

Uniform Standards

Running an equipment room as elite as the sports programs she services, Candace Olszak makes sure to stay ahead of demands imposed by vendors and unpredictable supply-chain issues created by the ongoing pandemic.

By Candace Olszak, E.M., C., Director Of Athletics Equipment And Services, Virginia Military Institute

An equipment manager's work is truly never done. Whether you have had a winning season, a losing season, or have been somewhere in the middle; at the end of it all (even before the season is over sometimes) it is already time to look forward to the next year.

For some this starts at the end of November. For others lucky enough to be going to conference championships and bowl games, it can be anywhere from mid-December to the beginning of January.

For all of us in equipment management, it becomes time to start preparing orders for practice and workout apparel, ordering new uniforms, inventorying and assessing uniforms and apparel that will be used for the next season, inspecting and replacing any

necessary equipment, and a whole lot more. It is particularly important to get a jump start on uniforms if you will be designing a new one. The list can seem endless at times.

“As much as we like to control every last aspect of our jobs as coaches and equipment managers, there are times when circumstances take it out of our control, and we all need to be made aware of any interruption in orders and the supply chain that would affect them...”

I want to preface this by stating that all equipment managers do things a little differently. Everyone has his or her own system to how they get things accomplished. Much like prepping new game balls, there are different ways to accomplish the same end goal.

I am definitely a “to-do list” person. For me, it is imperative to list each day and what needs to be accomplished that

day. This also holds me accountable and I can tell by a quick glance at my list how far ahead or behind I am on my goals and tasks for the day and week.

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I prefer to have things done well ahead of time, so if issues do arise, we can try to remedy them as quickly as possible. I like to meet with my vendors and brand contact person. Here at Virginia Military Institute, we are contracted with Under Armour, through BSN. We are always interested in what will be potentially available and new for the upcoming season.

After deciding what is available, we then schedule meetings with the head coach and his staff. We'll bring in our representative from our apparel vendor, who gives us the chance to view samples of these apparel items in person.


I make sure to stress to my coaches that they should select backup items in case their first choice is not available. Particularly in today's environment, I have found this speeds things along a little better so we don't have any lag time in trying to get back with a coach on an item if their initial choice isn't available.

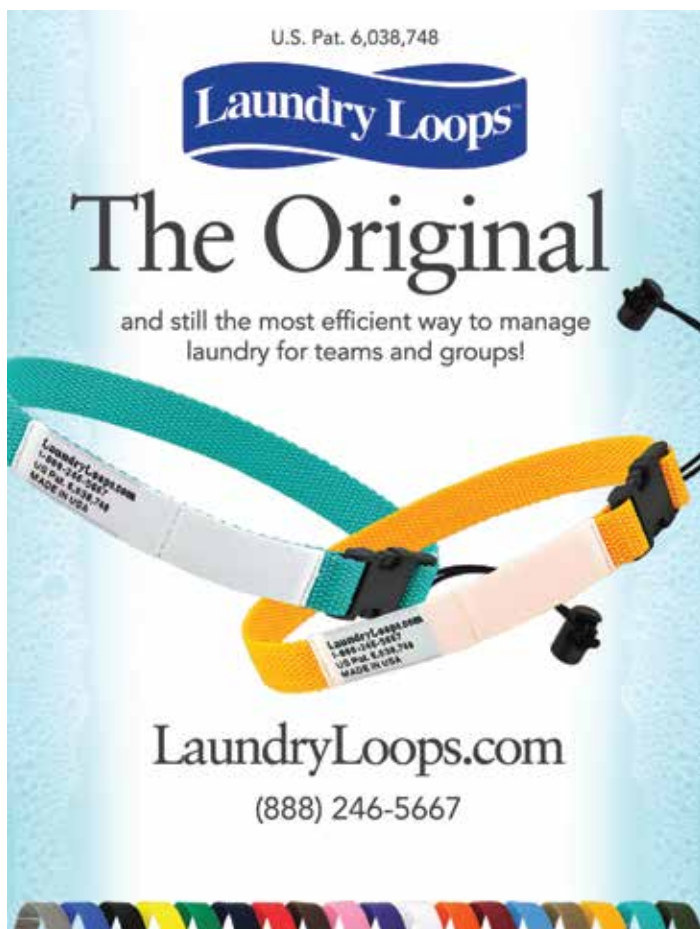
Currently, the pandemic has disrupted many supply chains that previously functioned without issue. This has been the case for nearly two years, and will likely continue well into 2022. Continued problems with other countries and their policies and protocols during the pandemic — as well as those in place here in the U.S. — have created backorder and stock problems for numerous items. Many of the uniforms and other apparel that is purchased and used

by colleges and universities within the U.S. is imported from foreign sources. Once the order leaves that particular country, it is then shipped to the U.S. Once the ship reaches its port here, it then sits in quarantine or until it can be unloaded. After unloading from the ship, packages then need to clear customs. Packages that have finally cleared customs are then on their way to the distribution centers, printing houses or wherever else they may need to go, and finally on to the equipment room. This is what happens if the process runs without flaw.

I have already had to deal with issues of businesses being closed due to a Covid outbreak twice, thus pushing orders out a little farther than expected. These types of problems should be expected as other countries continue to navigate through our current level of pandemic strain and post-pandemic, as well.

As much as we like to control every last aspect of our jobs as coaches and equipment managers, there are times when circumstances take it out of our control, and we all need to be made aware of any interruption in orders and the supply chain that would affect them.

My final piece of wisdom would be to treat everyone with respect, dignity and enthusiasm. Times are hard for everyone right now, and being nice does go a long way. 



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Photo: Towson University

Changing Seasons

By Adam Reed

The game of football unfolds in seasons. One season ends. Another begins.

As you read that last line, did you find yourself looking ahead to next fall? If so, you are doing yourself, your staff and your athletes a disservice. Coaches are always eager to turn the page and “get after it,” but the offseason exists as a crucial season in and of itself. What coaches do now, especially as it pertains to building their players into better athletes through their strength and conditioning program, has a profound impact on the type of season they will have next fall.

The work that must be done in the offseason may look different from the weekly in-season rotation which culminates in a game every weekend, but a careful, methodical approach remains necessary to produce the best possible results. In light of this, the off-season requires a definitive shift and a mental and physical reset to lay the foundation for success.

Detach, Reset And Reflect

Football rosters across the country are filled with human beings. It probably seems silly to point out, but every year coaches run the risk of forgetting this simple truth — and all of the human implications that come along with it.

Coaches walk a fine line every offseason as they look to hit the reset button and begin their offseason in the most productive way possible. For many coaches like Justin Lima, Towson University director of football performance, this means giving players some much-needed time off.

“Whether you won it all or you’re just sad because your season ended, you’re going to be emotional,” Lima says. “Coaches need to give players time to detach. They need some time away from football.

“They also need to not hear you as much. If they are constantly hearing the same voice with the same message, then it just becomes noise, and they tune you out.”

“You just have to be smart and let your players be people for a while,” Michael Doscher, strength and conditioning coordinator for Tift County School District in Georgia, adds. “Even for adult athletes, or NFL players, at the end of the season, they need to take a break and go be regular people.”

Some coaches find it easy to make this transition. Rick Sneade, the head football coach and director of strength and performance at Calvert High School in Prince Frederick, Md., welcomes the shift in his role with open arms. He relishes the chance to worry less about chasing championships and more about mentoring young people.

Sneade stresses the importance of using the time in the early offseason to shift the message back to individual football-related and big-picture goals. Just as the snow gives way to green grass in the spring, or the warm sunny days of summer give way to autumn leaves and crisp, cool air, opportunities for on-field success give way to opportunities for each player to work on themselves in the offseason.

“I intentionally go back to the things that are going to make us successful,” Sneade says. “You have to do that when the iron is hot. We’ve been with the players for three or four months, and now I have to drive home the importance of being bigger, faster and stronger while the season is still fresh in their minds.”

Take Inventory

Along with giving the players a chance to reset mentally, coaches need to ensure they have a good handle on where their players are physically. If the player’s body was a car, the start of the offseason isn’t time for quick check of the gauges, and a kick of the tires — it’s time for a full 100-point inspection.

At Towson, Lima looks at several factors to see where a player is at physically heading into the offseason. Injuries, imbalances, range of motion, body weight and body



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composition all serve as important indicators of how each player's body is holding up after a grueling season.

Unfortunately, some coaches wait until the end of the season to fully grasp what their players have been through. Maybe they dropped 20 pounds of muscle because they weren't eating enough. Maybe they added some weight because they couldn't train properly for a bit due to injury.

In cases like these, coaches can remedy the issue by staying more engaged during the season, but no coaching staff is perfect, and some lack the staff and resources to keep meticulous track of each player's unique situation.

At the start of the offseason then, getting back up to speed becomes imperative. Coaches should avoid rushing to get back to explosive speed

and power and start testing these more critical basics of player health.

"I don't think it would be smart to start testing strength such as a one rep max or anything like that immediately after the season," Lima explains. "Let's test movement quality instead."

If coaches can afford it, Lima suggests using motion screening software that takes the subjectivity out of the screening process. On the other hand, every program should have access to a scale and a tape measure, and testing basics like vertical or horizontal jump are free.

Lima encourages coaches to perform these jump tests with a single-leg takeoff and a double-leg-landing. When players know they will have both legs to catch themselves, coaches will get a more accurate reading on what each leg is truly capable of.

Ultimately, coaches' mileage will vary on which tests are most critical for their specific program, but don't miss the opportunity to understand the full picture of where your athletes are physically before you start your offseason strength and conditioning program.

Technique Not Intensity

As the program does get underway, coaches will have to reduce physical intensity and go back to reinforcing the basics. Fundamental movement patterns lay the foundation of excellent technique, while allowing the body time to recover.

"Our offseason workouts in the weight room start with a complete changeup. Now we're building a foundation," Sneade says. "We're going to build volume, but we're going to do it strategically, and implement the basic building blocks of how to properly lift and move."

"We go back to the basics, back to mobility work, and we introduce slowly, to make sure they understand their body and how to move in space. Not all of that is teaching players how to lift, it's also to help them rejuvenate."

"It's quality over quantity, once the season is over. Keep the quality

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of the work high, but the stress on the body low,” Doscher adds. “Where you would normally do a back squat, do a front squat, so you don’t load the lower back. Do a trap-bar deadlift instead of a straight-bar deadlift, or a dumbbell bench instead of a straight-bar bench. Take the stress off of the joint structure, but still keep the quality of work.”

There are so many different ways to accomplish the goal of reducing stress on the joints while slowly building back volume and intensity that any attempt at a comprehensive list would be an exercise in futility. The good news is that this variety can breathe some much-needed energy and yes, even fun into the program after a long and grueling season.

“We take advantage of the benefits of isometric training, because it’s easiest on the body from a stress standpoint,” Lima says. “Especially in football, the question is, ‘Can you move and control your own body?’ Using isometrics to work on that in the early offseason is absolutely fantastic.”

Lima also enjoys introducing some low-intensity sports during his offseason program. Towson football might play some dodgeball, basketball or soccer — it doesn’t have to be all isometrics or as Lima puts it, “boring stuff” like tempo runs.

Lima also adds that the more coaches can expand the playing or training space and limit the harsh, compressed changing of directions, the better. To reduce risk of


frivolous injury, dial the intensity down from 8 or 9 to a 5 or 6 on a ten-scale. Let the players enjoy themselves.

Doscher encourages players to go to the pool, incorporates battling ropes, med balls and more circuit work. Sneade tends to take more opportunities to do team-bonding, perhaps with a day at the beach, or volunteering in the community.

Other great options include rowing, golfing, biking and hiking — active recovery doesn’t need to be complicated.

Where the situation allows it, coaches should try and sneak in a break for themselves as well. If the players have been educated well during the season, if the standards have been held high, then coaches should trust the relationship with their athletes and the work they’ve already put in.

As long as they come back to training healthy, the panic button can be avoided. Ideally, as the offseason program begins in earnest, players and coaches alike should feel refreshed and excited to walk back into the weight room and chase greatness.

“It’s a different season. When our players come in the weight room in the offseason, I want them to say, ‘I had yesterday, and I was the best I could be yesterday, but that was yesterday. Today, I’m going to be the best I can be for today,’” Sneade says. “Let’s make today count, because we aren’t guaranteed tomorrow. And whether we are playing in a game today or not, let’s be uncommonly great.” 



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List Industries' Recruiter 2 Custom Sport Lockers combine high-quality components and accessories with the convenience of a pre-assembled ready-to-ship locker system that can arrive on your loading dock within one to two weeks from the order date. What's not to love?

Steve Troyano knows locker room installations. As Product Manager for wood and phenolic lockers for List Industries, he has completed locker room installs for the Los Angeles Rams, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Cincinnati Reds to name just a few top-shelf organizations. With just a two-day lead time, the Miami Heat ordered three lockers from List Industries that needed install before the team could open training camp. He made it work.

"There was a lot of pressure to get that job done well and get it done on time," says Troyano. "List Industries is not your typical locker manufacturer. We try to have lockers in stock at different distribution centers around the U.S. We have seven distribution centers and that makes us unique, because it makes us agile and flexible."

For football coaches at the high school and college level, Troyano is careful to remind us that just because List Industries serves some of the biggest organizations in professional sports, deep down, it's about serving the customer in a fast and accurate manner, no matter the size of the program or organization.

Quick-Ship Meets Custom Quality

The secret to this success is the Recruiter 2 Custom Sport Locker from List Industries. It enjoys the status of being — at the same time — a prefabricated locker the company can store in distribution centers and a locker that can be configured and accessorized to achieve a unique aesthetic.

"List Industries has a full line of quick-ship Recruiter 2 lockers right now," says Troyano. "With the Recruiter 2, we've taken the quality of a custom locker and made it quick-ship, so normally, we can ship out anywhere from one to 25 lockers in one week from our distribution center in Munster, Ind. From 26 to 50 lockers, we're talking about two weeks."

Installing the lockers is a snap. List Industries can fit 96 fully-assembled lockers on a 53-foot semi-trailer. With typical football locker room installations topping out around 120 lockers, all that's required to get these lockers on-site and ready for install is two truck shipments, a forklift and a loading dock.

"With the quick-ship Recruiter 2, we can add black seat cushions, name plate holders and shoulder-pad holders," says Troyano. "This is a 'set-back' model. It's 24 inches wide by 24 inches deep by 84 inches tall. The locker comes as an 81-inch locker and you build a wood sleeper base from two-by-fours, laid on the flat, which give you a 3-inch toe kick. The locker sits on top of the sleeper base. Once you build that sleeper base straight across the wall, you screw into the foot locker and you anchor into that wood sleeper base. You can also anchor to the wall if you wish. Then the lockers anchor to each other for an incredibly sturdy and well-built locker platform."

The Recruiter 2 comes in four additional models as well: full-panel, half curve, full curve and slant. It's extremely affordable and comes in red oak, maple, cherry or mahogany. Corner fillers, front fillers, left- and right-end panels, they come with everything needed to finish the installation job.

Accessorizing the lockers is where it gets fun, because List Industries' ability to add accessories makes the Recruiter 2 Custom Sport Locker not only a great value but a showpiece for any locker room in America. The locker comes with a security box, so you start with a padlock hasp on it.

"You can have a built-in combination lock by Master Lock or you can have a digital lock made by Hallowell," says Troyano. "All are great options. On the door, you can have an engraved school logo or a full-color UV logo, which is a great touch. If you want a USB outlet in the security box, we can add that for you. Your electrician can run drop-cables to each location — which we give to you in the shop drawings — and we will pull those drop cables through the electrical box, tie them off and hand-off the USB outlets to your electrician for final connections. As for project management, we are involved with the installation from soup to nuts."

For more information on Recruiter 2 Custom Sport Lockers, visit www.listindustries.com and click on the wood locker tab. That will take you to specifications, drawings and other useful information. To speak with Steve Troyano directly, call him at 843-371-4790.

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Recruiting: Does It End On National Signing Day?

Learning to expose frauds in today's recruiting scene will help you find the right athletes for the right reasons, and asking the right questions of high school players and athletes will only serve to support your program's culture.

By Coby Gipson, Executive Head Coach And Recruiting Coordinator, Lamar University

On a Friday night before National Signing Day, the staff I served with at the time was absolutely on fire, bringing in recruits from across the state of Texas for an overnight trip. At the time we were the only team in the conference bringing in players for the night — we knew we had to separate ourselves from our competitors and this was an area we were willing to pursue.

At that time in our division, we had to create an atmosphere to attract potential student athletes without using money to provide the experience. We decided to turn our locker room into a clean party atmosphere. We had multiple TVs and projectors for video games, NBA games, a ping pong table that our GA would play against anyone in slacks and blazer, phone charging stations, and to top it all off we had a popcorn machine! The only things missing were a Dr. Pepper fountain, ice cream machine and Nelly's greatest hits on repeat. My current players tell me he's washed. I completely disagree.

Our players joined in the fun with our coaches and prospects for a night of fellowship, and showing what our environment would be like should they choose to attend our school. We did this for three consecutive weekends and I was extremely proud of how our coaches and player hosts responded to this opportunity. I believe the universal answer when asked, "What are you looking for in a school?" is, "I want it to feel like home." Without a doubt, we were creating that in our visits and it was paying dividends on national signing day!

One conversation during the middle of the final Friday night forever changed my vision of recruiting. A young man

who was serving as a host came up to me in the middle of the Friday night festivities and said, "Coach, we don't ever do this." I asked what he meant, just trying to buy some extra time as conviction flooded over me. He quickly responded: "We are portraying our program as this, but we never do this together. If you really want to show them what it is like to be us, then why are we doing something we never do as a team?"

Whoever said the truth hurts was a smart individual. I am forever thankful to him for having enough courage to come talk to me and ask that question. I went home and looked in the mirror. Our players deserved better, and our recruits deserved a real picture. Neither side was getting what they needed.

Let me be clear when I say this was not an intentional attempt at deception, but a focused effort to bring the best players to our campus without considering the correlation to the real-life experience. At that point, intention didn't really matter. We were not presenting an authentic picture.

We coaches have all found ourselves in a situation in which we were treated one way until an agreement was made, and then the treatment changed afterward. Once one side gets what it wants, the effort and intentionality disappears. If this happens, was it ever authentic to begin with?

Student-athletes commit to representing a university by playing intercollegiate sports, and in some cases, that means sacrificing money to be a part of the program. They deserve better.

Authenticity Vs. Hypocrisy

I was a high school football coach for 13 years, with five of those years as head coach, before I moved on to the

college level as an offensive coordinator. I currently serve as a Division I recruiting coordinator. Upon arrival in college football, I made the conscious decision to approach recruiting the same way as a college coach that I did as a high school coach. I also had the privilege to serve as a college softball coach in an elite program for eight years including a National Championship in 2016.

The level of transparency in recruiting and subsequent follow up in real life was as meaningful an experience in shaping my own recruiting beliefs as anything I have experienced in sports. Mike Reed, the head softball coach at the University of Texas-Tyler, will go down as one of — if not the winningest coach — of all time no matter the sport. His standard of conduct is astronomically high, his retention is high, and his number of championship rings even higher. When expectations and standards are presented with absolute clarity, student-athletes often meet the standard and understand the reason for the standard.

The questions I told my high school athletes to ask in the recruiting process are the same questions I advise prospects to ask now. The only difference is I can now answer those questions directly and hopefully help the prospect and his family with some clarity in recruiting. At the end of the day, the reason we coach will reveal itself in the recruiting process. If we operate in the world of what can be done for me, we will create a legacy of using student-athletes for personal gain. That is inarguably tragic.

If during the recruiting process, I present the opportunity at Lamar University through rose-colored glasses, then change once the national letter of intent (NLI) is signed, I've created a disaster waiting for him on campus.

Coaches get frustrated when players do not perform according to our coaching. If I was a fraud in the recruiting process, and now my running back doesn't consistently chase the hip of the center on inside zone, then it's my fault.

Most coaches will be the first to say, "I told him what to do 1000 times," or, "He just doesn't get it." That's wrong. The coach just destroyed the trust bridge in a fraudulent recruiting process that was all about the coach and not about what's best for the player.

Questions To Ask

As a high school coach, I advised my players and families in the recruiting process to seek answers to vital questions. In some cases, I had preferences for a school based on my perception of fit, usually due to a prior relationship with the recruiting coach. Regardless of personal opinion, I wanted the player and family to make the decision based on best fit. Take the values of the family and match it to the values of the football program. Ask yourself if this is a school you would attend if football was not part of the equation.

Here are some incredibly important questions to ask in the recruiting process:

- 1. Does the school have your intended major?** Do your research. One day I was on the road recruiting with the head coach and he asked a prospect what his intended major was going to be. The prospect replied, "Nursing." At the time, my employer did not offer a nursing degree. At that moment in time, even though he was a player we really wanted, the head coach informed the prospect that if that was something he was set on doing, another school would be a better fit. Now that's a big picture perspective!
- 2. What is the support staff of the football program?** At Lamar, we have a head athletic trainer with a staff, a strength and conditioning coordinator and staff, dietician, an academic coordinator, equipment coordinator, access to tutors and access to a writing lab. Our coaches meet with our players to discuss academics weekly. Some schools have more, some will have less. It is important to know what resources the school can offer a prospect to promote success on and off the field.
- 3. How does your skill set fit into the scheme?** Players should expect the college coach to paint a clear picture of how he will maximize a prospect's skillset on the field.
- 4. How many players do you currently have on the roster at the prospect's position?**
- 5. What are the classifications of the players on the roster at the prospect's position?**
- 6. How many players are you signing at the prospect's position?**
- 7. How many players has a coach offered at a given position?** I even take that a step further and I will tell each running back offered who the other running back offers are. It is only one Twitter search away anyway. Transparency equals trust.
- 8. If a school offers a prospect, understand if the offer is committable or not.** In my opinion, a non-committable offer is not an offer. It is ridiculous; every offer we make is committable. In most cases, we offer multiple players for each open scholarship. In the event the scholarship is committed to, we will make a phone call to notify both the player and the high school coach. There will never be a situation when a player calls to commit that we tell him that his offer isn't good anymore. We will initiate the contact and be completely transparent.
- 9. If non-FBS, ask what the offer is for.** Many prospects hear the word "offer," and assume they are going to school for free. This is far from true. You will still need to fill out the FAFSA, pursue academic scholarships — and local scholarships you could potentially qualify for. This is vital in allowing a family to be in the best financial shape possible when the prospect begins college.
- 10. If a coach asks you to commit before presenting you and your family with a bottom line dollar figure, this should be a red flag!** Make sure you also know how each institution factors in loans to your financial aid package. I have heard of players being told school will not cost them anything out of pocket, but it could result in an unexpected accumulation of debt. Taking a loan to go to school is investing in yourself. However, players should go into the experience with eyes wide open and all details available.

Here are some identifiable red flags:

1. A lack of exposure to current players or former players.

I would highly encourage visiting with anyone currently in the program or who has been in the program with the coaches currently at the school. If you go on a visit and you do not get the opportunity to talk to players, there is probably a reason. In this case, the atmosphere presented on the recruiting visit may differ from the real atmosphere inside the program.

2. Coaches that do not live in the town where the school is located.

There could be multiple reasons that are understandable, and generally this will apply to schools located in smaller towns. If the coach does not live in the town due to a spouse's job, financial considerations, medical needs and other real-life reasons, that's understandable. However, if they are asking you to live in a town they are not willing to live in themselves, this could be a red flag. I believe it is vital for players to have access to their coaches, and for the coaches to have access to campus. To me, it is tough to claim "Family" and live 45 minutes from campus.

3. Coaches who rent their houses.

This may be irrelevant to you, however, a question we often get in the recruiting process is how long does the staff intend to remain at the school? In our current situation at Lamar, every coach with a family has bought a house in Beaumont, Texas. We are invested in this program and in this community. In determining how the program is being built, the intentions of the coaching staff are vital. Are they just building a win-now team or a sustained consistent winning program? There are no guarantees with coaches in a very volatile profession, but their living setup can help uncover intentions. Do not be afraid to ask the tough questions. It is worth it to uncover the truth earlier rather than later.

4. Ask former players what their relationship is like with their coaches after their eligibility has ended.

If the relationship ceases to exist at the conclusion of eligibility, then it never really started.

5. Are you plan A or plan B?

If you are currently in high school, and a school offers you, you should look at their history of signing high school players vs. transfers. With transfer rules making it easier to gain immediate eligibility, you need to know. If a school signed zero high school players in the previous recruiting cycle, then chances are you are a plan B prospect or lower. Again, is that coach trying to win now or building a long-term program? For example, in FCS football, each program can sign a maximum of 30 players known as initial counters. At Lamar in the previous recruiting cycle, we signed 30 high school football players.

6. When touring the university and athletic facility, have an idea of what you want to see.

Typically this would be the areas you will spend the most time in as a student-athlete. If you are on a visit as a potential football player and no one shows you the weight room, this is a red flag! If there is something you want to see, do not be afraid to ask to see it!

Football is awesome. Football is not awesome enough to overcome anyone being miserable. Players will not maximize their abilities on the field if they do not find a good fit off the field.

As a college coach now, I still have a passion for helping prospects find the best fit. Sometimes, that fit is not going to be my school. That is okay. It's not about me or even Lamar University. It's about the student-athlete. That is how I viewed recruiting as a high school coach. Changing my outlook now would be hypocrisy.

If a college coach tells you early in the process his school is the right one, call his bluff! Coaches do not know you well enough to say that early in the process. My job is not to talk you into coming to Lamar. I am going to be 100 percent transparent in telling our recruits and families who we are and what we believe.

Our players sit in the front row of class. They do not find this out on the first day of class; that would be wrong. We address this in the recruiting process, and if this bothers a prospect, then we have to be willing to let him go and find the right guy. This approach gives everyone in the process the opportunity to make the right decision, a decision that will impact the student-athlete for the rest of his life. A decision of that magnitude should be made with all cards on the table, even if a given card may push the prospect away from your program.


Identifying Red Flags

Let's talk about some common red flags in recruiting. Certain issues come up regularly that are not easily identifiable as red flags. In fact, sometimes, they are erroneously viewed as positives.

"Family" is a very popular term that gets thrown around in today's college football programs. However, many coaches do not clearly define why their programs constitute a FAMILY. At Lamar, you are going to see our own children running up and down the hallways, see our players coming over to our houses, and hear us talking about subjects that do not include football.

We are going to love our players like a parent. I did not love my wife the first time I met her; I fell in love with her over time. I loved my children from the time they were created; they did not do anything to earn that. The same love exists with my players.

I am going to push you to be 100 percent of your potential on and off the field. If you leave our program 98 percent of what you could have been, then we all failed by 2 percent.

Loving someone is holding them accountable for emptying the tank in all facets of life. We have a specific plan in place to make this happen at Lamar University. 

At Lamar University, we have a process that focuses just as much on determining the fit of the person as much as the player. To read more about how Lamar University implements its own process, visit www.afcainsider.com and search Lamar University.

Representing The Best Of The Best

The Werner Ladder AFCA FBS National Coach of the Year Award is presented to the coach whose ability to positively build his program has garnered respect from his peers around the country.

Their names are synonymous with greatness in the storied profession of football coaching: Amos Alonzo Stagg, Frank Leahy, Woody Hayes, Ara Parseghian, Paul “Bear” Bryant, Darrell Royal, John McKay, Bo Schembechler, Vince Dooley, Tom Osborne. Their names alone conjure grainy images saturated with intensity and competitive fire, men stalking the sideline, bellowing orders to keep their young charges focused and moving forward against forces determined to hold them at bay.

Each of these men — and many more — have earned the title of National Coach Of The Year from the American Football Coaches Association. What began in 1935 when Lynn “Pappy” Waldorf was named as the first AFCA Coach of the Year has continued for 86 years, culminating in Tom Allen’s victory in 2020. Allen was selected by a vote of the Active AFCA members at FBS schools as the clear winner of the 2020 Werner Ladder AFCA FBS National Coach of the Year, marking the third time an Indiana head coach won the award. The other two were Bo McMillin in 1945 and John Pont in 1967.

Allen’s win marked the second year in a row with Werner stepping up to sponsor the oldest and most prestigious of all the Coach of the Year awards. Werner is the world leader in ladders and has a complete line of climbing products designed for working at heights. The portfolio includes ladders, attic ladders, scaffolding, pump jacks, stages, planks, stepstools, accessories and fall protection equipment including harnesses, lanyards, anchors and compliance kits. From ladders to fall protection, Werner provides a full line of climbing equipment that’s engineered for maximum safety, durability and productivity at every height.

“Werner is once again excited to be the sponsor and associated with such a prestigious award,” said Stacy Gardella, vice president of brand marketing at WernerCo. “Werner is thrilled to be partnering with AFCA and honoring these coaches who ‘step up’ every day on and off the field.”

Like Werner, the American Football Coaches Association is also the world leader, but in football coaching education. With more than 11,000 members around the world, ranging from the high school level to the professional ranks. According to its constitution, the AFCA was formed, in part, to “maintain the highest possible standards in football and in the coaching profession” and to “provide a forum for the discussion and study of all matters pertaining to football.”

For Coaches, By Coaches

The Werner Ladder AFCA FBS National Coach of

the Year is the AFCA’s oldest award, as well. Its history is unsurpassed, and its value cannot be overstated, because the winner is chosen by coaches who know the game, and know what it takes to get to the top.


“It’s our oldest award,” says Vince Thompson, Director of Media Relations for AFCA. “We first started honoring a coach of the year back in 1935, and have done so every year since then. It’s one way our coaches can honor the best of the best in their profession. And it’s one of the only coach of the year awards that is voted on by the coaches themselves. So, it’s truly a peer award.”

Even more, the winners of the Werner Ladder AFCA FBS National Coach of the Year award aren’t always coaches who’ve won national championships during the season they won the award. It’s an important point, because it demonstrates that for the voting coaches, winning it all doesn’t mean you’re necessarily the best in the game.

“The coach of the year award means a lot to these guys because it’s voted on by their adversaries on the football field,” says Thompson. “It’s voted on by the guys who they play against, or guys who know how they build a program. These are fellow coaches that know how they coach and what they do. And that’s why this award means so much more. It’s truly an award that personifies excellence over an entire season.”

Nearly all coaches would tell you that the game of football has real power in our society. Nowhere else in sports can a young man better learn the value of overcoming real adversity, trusting in the guy next to you, and putting the team first over any selfish desires. And yet, only a fraction of a minority of football coaches at the FBS level will ever win a national championship.

Real greatness in football coaching is first defined by putting student-athletes first, coaching not only scheme, but weaving into the fabric of the game important life lessons and values integral to becoming a great husband, father and citizen. As a world leader in ladder manufacturing, Werner knows what it means to support a champion’s climb to the top.

“There is no greater honor than being voted coach of the year by your peers,” says Todd Berry, Executive Director of the AFCA. “We are excited about working with Werner as the title sponsor of the award. Werner is a global company that supports collegiate athletics in a variety of ways. We look forward to our continued partnership with them to bring more recognition to the AFCA’s oldest award, and one of the most important honors we have.” 





IMPORTANT NOTICE:

By booking a room in the AFCA Room Block, you agree to secure an AFCA Membership and Convention Fee, or obtain other AFCA credentials. Failure to do so could result in the cancellation of your reservation. A one night's room and tax deposit is required when making your reservation. These fees will be processed when your reservation is confirmed. Payments made by credit card are subject to a one-time, non-refundable \$4 processing fee. If you prefer to pay by check, send payment for one night's room and 16.75% tax for each room requested to MCI USA. Charges will appear as AFCA Housing. A \$50 cancellation fee applies to all canceled reservations. If you do not secure your reservation by November 30, you will be required to contact AFCA to verify your membership and obtain a reservation booking code.

WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO MAKE YOUR HOUSING RESERVATIONS IMMEDIATELY. HOUSING CLOSES DECEMBER 10.

MCI USA IS THE SOLE HOUSING AGENT FOR THE AFCA

WEBSITE:

WWW.MCISEMI.COM/AFCA2022

PHONE/QUESTIONS:

877.557.5338 (US/Canada)

972.349.5863 (International)

Monday - Friday 8am - 5pm CST

EMAIL:

AFCA@MCIEvents.com

MAIL:

MCI/AFCA Housing

PO Box 840907

Dallas, TX 75284

All Suite requests must be made through MCI USA.

IF YOU ARE ATTENDING THE CONVENTION, DUES, FEES, AND TICKET REQUESTS NOT RECEIVED BY DECEMBER 10 WILL BE PROCESSED AT HIGHER CONVENTION FEES AND TICKET PRICES.

DEADLINES

Preregistration - **December 10, 2021**

Housing - **December 10, 2021**

(See next page for important Housing information)

MEMBERSHIP DUES

FBS Head Coaches – **\$200**

FBS Assistant Coaches/Graduate Assistants (countable) – **\$100**

FBS "Other" Coaches – **\$150**

FCS, DII, DIII, NAIA, JUCO, High School – **\$60**

NFL – **\$100**

Non-NFL Professional – **\$60**

Not currently coaching this season – **\$200**

International – **\$100**

Other – **\$200**

CONVENTION FEE

All coaches attending the Convention will be required to pay a Convention fee. Life Members are exempt from this fee. The fee is based upon the received date or postage date of the payment.

~~July 1 – July 31: \$15~~

~~August 1 – October 31: \$30~~

November 1 – December 10: **\$40**

At Convention: **\$60**

ONLINE PREREGISTRATION

Your AFCA membership application or renewal, Convention fee, and ticket purchases may be completed on the AFCA website at www.AFCA.com. **Please assist the AFCA staff by prepaying your membership dues and Convention fee by the December 10 deadline.** PICK UP YOUR CREDENTIALS AT REGISTRATION IN THE EXHIBIT HALL.

PREREGISTRATION ASSISTANCE

If you need assistance with Membership or Convention Preregistration, please email Membership@AFCA.com or call 254.754.9900

THE AFCA CONVENTION IS A CLOSED CONVENTION. CREDENTIALS ARE REQUIRED FOR ALL ATTENDEES.

REGISTRATION IN THE EXHIBIT HALL

In the Exhibit Hall, there will be three lines for entry to the Registration Area:

- 1) Pre-Registered
- 2) Member Portal Registration (Credit Card Only)
- 3) On-Site Registration.

The Pre-Registered line will be for all individuals who have **already purchased their membership AND convention registration** — this line will also be where **Club 35/Life Members** go to pick up credentials. Upon arriving at the front of the line, you will be directed to an open kiosk where you will pull up your badge by scanning the QR code that will be sent to your email in the days leading up to the event or by entering the cell phone number/email address linked to your account. You will check your badge information for accuracy then pick it up from a nearby printer. Quick and easy!

The Member Portal Registration (Credit Card Only) will be for individuals who still **need to purchase a membership and/or convention registration and want to self-register on a computer**. Upon arriving at the front of the line, you will be directed to an open computer where you will need to login to your Member Portal account to complete your purchase (credit card purchases only in this line). If you do not know your account login information, please reach out PRIOR to the event to reset your credentials! After completing your purchase, your badge will be available for pickup at a nearby printer.

On-Site Registration will be for all individuals who still **need to purchase a membership and/or convention registration and want a clerk to assist**. Cash, check, and credit cards payments will all be accepted in this line. If you are attempting to register multiple people on a single transaction, this is your line. After the clerk finishes processing your payment, they will hand you your badge.

REGISTRATION HOURS

Registration will be in the Exhibit Hall of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center.

Sunday, January 9: 9am - 5pm

Monday, January 10: 9am - 5pm

Tuesday, January 11: 9am - 12noon

1922 100 2022

FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION,
VISIT WWW.AFCA.COM

SUNDAY

8am - All Day	Committee Meetings	2pm - 3:50pm	High School Coaches Academy
11am - 11:50am	NAIA Assistant Coaches Forum	3pm - 3:50pm	NJCAA Coaches Forum
11:30am - 1pm	PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE LUNCHEON (This event will combine the Club 35 Luncheon, Board, and 35 Under 35 class)	4pm - 4:50pm	ACCFCA Coaches Forum
		4pm - 4:50pm	National High School Coaches Forum
12pm - 1:50pm	NAIA Caucus Meeting & Ticket Distribution	5pm - 6pm	Kickoff Speaker
1pm - 1:50pm	First Timers Meeting	6:30pm - 8:20pm	Buzz Sessions
		8:30pm - 9:20pm	Minority Issues Forum
		8:30pm - 9:20pm	Strength & Conditioning Forum

MONDAY

8am - 8:50am	FBS Assistant Coaches Meeting	2pm - 3:50pm	International Session
8:30am - 11:50am	General Session	2pm - 4:50pm	High School General Session
12pm - 1:30pm	Honors Luncheon	2pm - 4:40pm	Junior College General Session
1pm - 1:50pm	FCS Assistant Coaches Forum	3pm - 4:30pm	NAIA Coaches Business Meeting
2pm - 2:50pm	FCS Head Coaches Voting Meeting	3pm - 3:50pm	Div 2 Head Coaches Voting Meeting
2pm - 2:50pm	Div 2 Assistant Coaches Forum	4pm - 4:50pm	Div 3 Head Coaches Voting Meeting
2pm - 2:50pm	Div 3 Assistant Coaches Forum	6:30pm	AFCA Tailgate Party
2pm - 3:50pm	GA Career Forum		

TUESDAY

8:30am - 11:50am	General Session	1pm - 1:50pm	Outside the Lines
12pm - 1:50pm	NCAA Recruiting Seminar	12pm - 3pm	FBS Head Coaches Meeting
12pm - 12:50pm	Chalk Talks		





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- Various Zoom gatherings with other wives throughout the year
- Service projects
- Attend the annual AFCWA Convention to connect, take part in various programs, enjoy speakers, shop the silent auction, and much more... January 9-11, 2022 in San Antonio, Texas

2021 Allstate AFCA Good Works Team[®] Lends Helping Hands



Allstate is pledging \$1 million to honor the Allstate AFCA Good Works Team, as well as their non-profits of choice, for their remarkable commitment to community service. Made possible by new NCAA Name Image Likeness (NIL) rules, Allstate has an opportunity to financially empower athletes who serve their communities, opening the door to new possibilities for players and beyond.

This is the largest NIL investment yet for community impact by a college football sponsor — and insurer. Unlike other recent NIL announcements, Allstate is financially empowering players in recognition for their work in local communities, not just their performance on the field. Community leadership aligns with Allstate’s values and is part of its longstanding commitment to creating positive societal change.

“We dedicate resources to financially empower people,” said Terrance Williams, Good Works Team selection committee member and Executive Vice President and General Manager, Allstate Agency Distribution. “This historic decision allowing college athletes to be compensated for the use of their Name, Image and Likeness means Allstate can foster equity for these athletes who are community leaders.”

“Throughout the 30 years of the Good Works Team, we have honored individuals who create lasting impact in their communities and at school,” said AFCA Executive Director Todd Berry. “We have the perfect roster of outstanding individuals that continue that legacy for 2021 and beyond.”

The following players have been named to the 2021 Allstate AFCA Good Works Team and will be eligible for compensation. The honorary head coach, whose charity will also receive a donation, is listed below.



Matt Wells **Texas Tech University**

Head coach Matt Wells leads by example and models behaviors of a true community champion. Under Wells, Texas Tech increased its commitment to serving others, not just in words but in actions. In the past year, the team has served more than 1,100 community service hours in an underprivileged local area. During Wells’ tenure, the team volunteers’ countless hours with

the Boys & Girls Club of Lubbock, Habitat for Humanity, South Plains Food Bank and local school districts. Wells implemented the Special Spectator program, which invites a student with special circumstances to meet the team and receive recognition on the video board for each home game and led multiple other efforts.



Cal Adomitis **University of Pittsburgh**

Senior long snapper Cal Adomitis embodies what it means to be a community champion through his commitment to the city of Pittsburgh. He aided in pandemic relief efforts by donating his football student-athlete per diem so that city youth football teams would have resources to purchase bottled water for practices and games. He’s attended Pittsburgh Public Schools’ “Bring Your Father to School” day numerous times, where he was paired with students who did not have someone to attend with. Adomitis has raised money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Make-A-Wish Foundation and families who are without home heating during the winter months.



Alnazir Blackman **Fairleigh Dickinson University**

Graduate Student running back and team captain Alnazir Blackman is a founding member of Athletes for Change and Equality (ACE), a student-athlete run organization whose mission is to acknowledge and accept differences within the FDU community and provide a safe space for those who feel alienated to be heard, accepted and empowered. As part of ACE, Blackman has organized and led recurring meetings between university leaders, teams and student-athletes, an event with the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office, social media initiatives, and educational zoom meetings for the larger FDU community. Blackman has also played an integral role in the Andy Talley Bone Marrow Foundation’s “Be The Match” bone marrow and blood drives throughout his career at FDU.

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Mac Brown
Ole Miss

Since seventh grade, Ole Miss senior punter Mac Brown has raised funds each year for Lou Gehrig’s Disease, also known as ALS, along with a group of neighborhood friends to honor a childhood friend’s dad who was diagnosed with ALS. Together, they started Awesome Lemonade Stand, in Eden Prairie, Minn., to help his friend’s family. Eight years later, Brown and his friends have raised over \$102,000 for ALS research. This year’s fundraiser raised more than \$30,000. He also volunteers as a swimming coach for kids with special needs and has assisted patients with various injuries and disabilities at Ranken Jordan Pediatric Bridge Hospital in St. Louis.



Philip Green
Minot State University

Redshirt freshman Philip Green started a podcast called “Mental Game” with his teammate at Minot State. The podcast is centered on bringing awareness of mental health issues among student-athletes that offers them a platform and resource. He discusses topics and issues in college athletics like mental checks and days, lack of sleep, burnout, balancing the load, counselors for teams, the importance of women coaches in sports and advocating or supporting mental health. Green has coordinated multiple fundraisers for mental health awareness, where a portion of the money earned is donated to the Hayden Hurst Foundation.



Sean Clifford
Penn State University

Redshirt senior quarterback Sean Clifford is an active participant in a student-run philanthropy, THON, committed to enhancing the lives of children and families impacted by childhood cancer. He has developed a relationship through Team IMPACT with nine-year-old Sawyer Bell, who was diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma. He finds time to serve on the board — and is past president — for Penn State’s “Uplifting Athletes,” helping the chapter raise nearly \$1.4 million for kidney cancer treatment and research. On a regular basis, he goes to local elementary schools to read stories. Clifford also serves as Penn State Football’s leadership liaison for volunteer activities.



Mo Hasan
University of Southern California

Redshirt senior quarterback Mo Hasan models what it means to have a servant’s heart through his passion for philanthropic endeavors. Hasan purchased a FedEx truck from Craigslist, which he repurposed and named the Hunger Relief Mobile to aid in distributing food to the homeless on behalf of his nonprofit, Second Spoon. He founded Second Spoon after discovering how much food was being thrown out in college dining halls and wasted in our country. While at USC, Hasan has participated in a variety of community outreach endeavors through Trojan Outreach, USC Athletics’ community service department, which focuses on giving back to the surrounding community.



Nakobe Dean
University of Georgia

Junior linebacker Nakobe Dean helped to develop Dawgs for Pups, the Georgia football program’s effort to directly affect the lives of local youth in Athens County. In its first eight months, the program raised more than \$200,000 to help youth in the community. Dean spearheaded a drive that raised about \$100,000 for Wi-Fi hotspots for local children. With remote schooling, he secured more than 27,000 pounds of food donations for area children via the Northeast Georgina Food Bank and assisted a multi-team effort that collected 437 new or gently used coats for local youth with the assistance of the Boys & Girls Club of Athens.



Kenneth Horsey
University of Kentucky

Junior offensive guard Kenneth Horsey has a remarkable comeback story that led him to paying it forward and becoming an advocate for heart disease prevention in his community. In 2018, before arriving at Kentucky, he had open-heart surgery and was told by doctors that his football career was over. But he was not deterred and came to Kentucky as a redshirt with the goal of earning a starting spot, which he did. Since then, because of his heart condition and how supported he felt through his surgery and recovery, he began volunteering with the Lexington chapter of the American Heart Association. Horsey has volunteered at numerous heart walk events, in-person and virtually.

AFCOA[®]

Trade Show



The 2022 AFCA Centennial Convention will feature a fantastic trade show hall at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas. Complete with integrated Skills & Drills field, the AFCA Trade Show helps coaches learn all about the products and services needed to run a successful football program. If you are interested in exhibiting at the 2022 AFCA Trade Show in San Antonio, please visit www.AFCAExhibits.com for more info!



Jessie Malit
North Carolina Central University

Redshirt junior defensive lineman Jessie Malit organizes a yearly book drive to create a library in his mother's home village in Kenya. To date, he has collected more than 400 books. He spearheaded his school's Student-

Athlete Advisory Committee's E.A.G.L.E.S. (Educated Actions Generate Lifelong Empowerment & Success) vote initiative and a campus-wide March to the Polls event. Out of 315 eligible student-athletes registered to vote, he helped to register 289, which includes everyone on his football team. He mentors and reads books to elementary school students in Durham and led a church youth group that helped to provide housing for homeless people in the Concord community.



Elijah McAllister
Vanderbilt University

Senior linebacker Elijah McAllister is the co-founder and co-president of the Black Student-Athlete Group, which aims to create a safe and comfortable for Black student-athletes at Vanderbilt. The group also

works to address racial issues in sports and offer guidance toward professional and personal development. He serves as a representative for the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, which helps them communicate and support each other, have a voice with the athletics administration and university community, develop leadership skills and participate in community service activities. McAllister frequently volunteers and fundraises for Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital and Turner's Heroes, an organization created to help patients at children's hospitals.



Camren McDonald
Florida State University

Redshirt junior tight end Camren McDonald founded a nonprofit called To Rise and Progress in 2019, with the goal to "change the lives of as many individuals and families as possible." His foundation has

a frequent pizza donation program (weekly during the academic year), hygiene kit giveaways, clothing drives, blanket giveaways and free yoga classes for the community. During the spring of 2020 when campus shut down, McDonald became a certified yoga instructor and began leading outdoor yoga classes for the campus community in addition to virtual classes. In addition to his foundation work, he also serves with Fellowship of Christian Athletes and reads to children at local elementary schools.



Harry Miller
Ohio State University

Junior offensive tackle Harry Miller is a member of the board for the Imagination School in Los Brasiles, a neighborhood outside of Managua, Nicaragua. He made approximately 10 mission trips over the last eight

years to provide children with educational materials and nutritional food. Locally in Columbus, Miller actively volunteers with the 2nd and 7 Foundation, an organization whose outreach includes reading to elementary school students, and Bernie's Book Bank, which distributes free books to children in need.



Chibuikwe Odo
Davidson College

Senior defensive end Chibuikwe Odo is passionate about giving back and serving the community. He started a reading program with the Ada Jenkins Center and launched an Alumni Spotlight initiative at his

high school to highlight successful alums from diverse backgrounds to inspire kids. He has facilitated an athletes' forum and was the catalyst for many teams to work towards a better team culture, community involvement and campus engagement supporting anti-racism initiatives. Odo is training to be a suicide hotline volunteer and participating in a study of Davidson's Commission on Race and Slavery for a Chidsey Leadership Fellows grant, in order to create meaningful dialogue surrounding the findings.



Deven Osborne
Dixie State University

Senior wide receiver Deven Osborne served as president of Dixie State University's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and spearheaded several social justice community events and initiatives,

including a Unity March, which focused on racial equality and social justice activism. He organized a discussion about social justice topics and hosted an on-site voter registration and organ donor sign-up. In addition to promoting 2020 Census participation, Osborne also led several other on-campus and community service projects, including Black History Month events, and he organized readings at several elementary schools. Osborne hosted the inaugural Trailblazers vs. Trafficking week of events that featured education on the dangers, recognition and elimination of human trafficking.



Austin Phillips
Ashland University's senior tight end

Austin Phillips has traveled to the Dominican Republic on two mission trips to help build new schools and run basketball camps for the less fortunate. He has also served on the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, helping to plan and execute fundraising events for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. In the local Ashland community, Phillips helped run the Never Give Up Football camp for kids of all ages with muscular dystrophy and walked around the community picking up recycling to take to Ashland County Recycling Center.



Race Porter
University of Washington Senior punter and holder Race Porter works with a former

teammate to raise awareness for and decrease the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Together, they created HOMS (Heart on My Sleeves), a clothing line that allows people to express themselves. HOMS is a brand that promotes the idea that everyone is different; everyone is unique; everyone is an individual, and everyone should be able to express themselves exactly how they prefer. Through HOMS, Porter hopes to build a community of people that are proud to share their mental health issues and be part of something bigger.



Darien Rencher
Clemson University Tigers senior running back Darien

Rencher is a Journey Ambassador for Clemson's Passionate About Winning program, which cultivates leadership in football student-

athletes through personal growth, professional development and life skills. Rencher volunteers with numerous philanthropic initiatives in his community, including: "Kicks, Cleats & Kids" (shoe giveaway for underserved youth), reading at Clemson Elementary, "Clements Kindness" (working with pediatric cancer patients) and visiting seniors at a local retirement community. He also stocks and distributes items

INSIDE the HEADSET
with the AFCA

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PJ Fleck	Matt Campbell
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Jeff Monken	Gary Patterson
Craig Bohl	Lincoln Riley
Mike Norvell	And Many More!

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for Anderson Interfaith Ministries' community assistance program and Golden Harvest Food Bank. Rencher serves as a "Mister" in a program to promote African American males becoming schoolteachers.



Hunter Rodrigues
University of California, Davis

University of California, Davis junior quarterback Hunter Rodrigues has made it a priority to improve the Davis community since he arrived on campus. He's an active participant with Young Life Capernaum, where he's a mentor, and he volunteers to do an assortment of events with kids who have special needs. Through his work with Young Life, Rodrigues spearheaded a group of teammates to attend the Shining Star special needs prom.



Jaran Roste
Bethel University (Minn.)

Since arriving at Bethel University, senior quarterback Jaran Roste has logged over 500 hours of community service, from preparing tax returns for low-income families in the Minneapolis area to volunteering with other students to pack meals for children in other parts of the world. He serves as a mentor with an on-campus organization called BUILD, where he lives in the same residence hall with students who have intellectual disabilities to help them develop life skills and transition them to living independently. With this program, he also helps these students throughout the week with their study skills and homework from their core courses and electives.



Alex Shillow
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Senior safety Alex Shillow led community service and fundraising efforts to raise awareness for Make-A-Wish Foundation. He helped

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raise over \$15,000 for two wishes to send a child to Walt Disney World and to the NBA All-Star Game. Through fundraising and coordinated efforts, he has led clothing donation collections to provide underprivileged families in the Commerce community with Christmas gifts, as well as an assortment of awareness initiatives for social justice issues. Shillow sat on the university's Voter Coalition committee to help make voter registration easily accessible for students, including registering his entire team to vote, which initiated a conference-wide challenge.



DeValon Whitcomb
University of South Dakota

From working a clothing drive to mentoring high schoolers, senior defensive tackle DeValon Whitcomb's commitment to serving the community knows no bounds.


He volunteers with the Special Olympics over the summer, the Boys and Girls Club's during school breaks and works with an organization that services youth by addressing poverty, promoting cultural integration and fostering academic excellence. He also distributes food on Wednesdays and Fridays to an average of 856 families per month. Since March of 2020, DeValon

and other volunteers have distributed tens-of-thousands of pounds of food and 500 personal protective equipment masks. As the African American Athlete Association president and co-founder, Whitcomb works to retain African American student-athletes' attendance by creating an inclusive campus environment



Julius Wilkerson
Wayne State University

Sophomore linebacker Julius Wilkerson is on pace to graduate at the end of the spring semester with three years of eligibility left to play. He works with Wayne State's freshman orientation program and

helps new students on campus move into their dorms. He has raised money and brought presents for the "Adopt a Family" initiative, and collected toiletries for a basic needs drive, which he later distributed to various shelters with his teammates. Wilkerson has volunteered by asking people to register for a bone marrow drive, made sandwiches for the Salvation Army and worked a food drive for families that have been impacted by COVID-19. Over Zoom, Wilkerson participates in the 2nd and 7 Foundation's reading program. 

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Moving The Pocket

By Jake Landry, Quarterbacks Coach, Temple University

Throughout my playing and coaching careers, I have been a part of a wide variety of offenses. However, a common theme in every program has been a strong offensive line that establishes the line of scrimmage to create explosive plays.

One of the first things I always encourage our quarterbacks to ask is “why” in our position meetings. I live by the adage that no question is dumb, and I reiterate that to my group before spring ball. The hope is that what our players learn from my teaching during position meetings will become a direct reflection of our unit when we practice and play in games. I want our quarterbacks to leave our meetings with absolute confidence in everything we have covered so what they have learned is second nature in games.

When I played, I undoubtedly drove some of my coaches mad for asking “why” so many times during meetings. As a coach, I welcome that question. It is my job to ensure that our players understand their respective assignments and what we are trying to accomplish on every play as a unit. Each player should prepare like he is the starter because if he doesn’t and the opportunity arises for him to play, the lack of training will be painfully obvious.

At Temple, we want to base our offensive identity around establishing the run game. Whether that be the running back, quarterback or wide receiver, we will accomplish this by any means necessary. That allows us to be efficient in the pass game. We will present multiple looks within our offense, utilizing drop-back concepts, quick game, naked, play-actions and sprint-outs.

Our goal is to not fall victim to our own offense, which is easy to do in this modern era with coaches having so many options. Instead, we play to the strengths of our starting quarterback. Rather than force a certain concept or design on our personnel, we will adapt our offense and quarterback play to what is most effective and efficient.

Importance Of The Moving Pocket

A part of our offense that is essential to our success is

changing the launch point for the quarterback in the pass game. This can be done in several different ways: play-action passes built off the run game, sprinting out, calling a naked or having a dual-hitch/naked concept. These play types ensure that your quarterback does not become a statue in the pocket. It can also help minimize the amount of hits or sacks a quarterback takes throughout a game and season.

The height of a quarterback varies at every level from high school to the NFL. Not every quarterback is fortunate to be six feet or taller, so the following concepts are meant to maximize a signal-caller’s skillset and minimize the number of batted balls at the line.

The Hitch/Naked (Flood) is one of the easiest play types to install and implement into an offense. (See Diagrams 1 & 2)

We run this particular play often, and it contains multiple different passing concepts. It is a simple flood concept that most label as a naked or sprint-out. This play allows the quarterback to try to take a free-access hitch or a potential explosive play if the look is right for a conversion vertical route. If neither of those throws are there, it simply turns into a naked flood.

However, no matter the passing concept, our quarterback will start his read progression by locating the corner covering the wide receiver running the hitch-conversion route. If the corner is playing off by 5 yards or more to the hitch conversion, the receiver will run a 6-yard hitch. This then becomes a free-access gift throw for the quarterback in which he will take the snap and immediately deliver the football.

But if the corner is pressing or within 5 yards, the receiver will then convert his hitch route into a vertical. When the corner is in this position, the quarterback will next locate the safety. If it is a 2-high safety look, the quarterback will identify the safety to the hitch-conversion side of the field. If the safety is inside the hash or not in position to make a play on the vertical route, the quarterback will then take a three-step drop with a hitch and throw the conversion. If the safety is outside of the hash or in the middle of the field, we will be off the route.

Diagram 1 – Hitch/Naked (Flood) Vs. 2 High

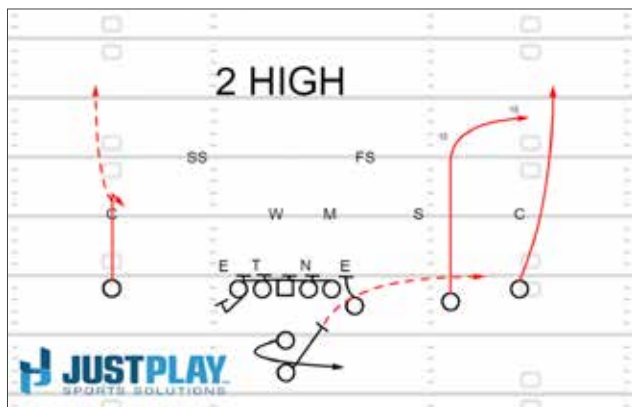
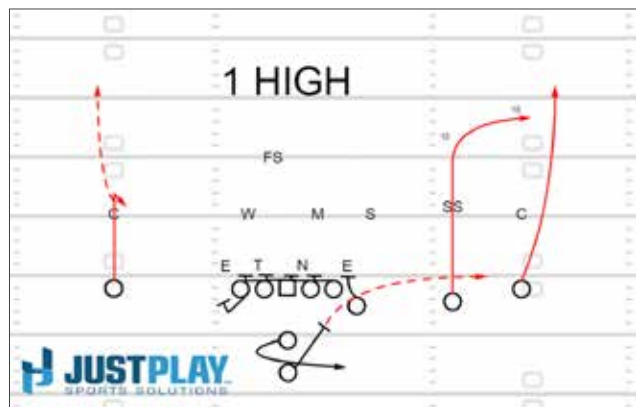


Diagram 2 – Hitch/Naked (Flood) Vs. 1 High



If the defense is showing a 1-high safety look, the same rules apply whether the safety can get over the top of the conversion route or underneath to the hitch. It is built into our progression for the quarterback. If he is unsure on the throw or should the hitch-conversion receiver not win on his release, the quarterback will then progress to the naked away from that route.

Once he has determined that the hitch or conversion routes are not open, he will then naked away from the conversion side. In Diagram 1 and Diagram 2, you can see it is a simple flood concept as I explained earlier. We will read this concept with a low-to-high-to-low progression. This type of concept is good for quarterbacks who throw well on the run. Additionally, it suits an athletic, dual-threat quarterback who can extend the play with his feet if nothing is available.

Quarterback's Read Progression

1. What is the depth of the cornerback to the hitch-conversion side?
2. Where is the safety located to the hitch-conversion side?
3. If hitch or conversion is not covered, jab step then gain depth and naked toward the flood concept.

It is not overly complicated for the offensive line either. They have a quick slide protection opposite of where the quarterback could potentially head on a naked.

For the offensive line, it is a simple slide protection with the tight end and tailback included. The line is responsible for the gap opposite of where the quarterback would go on a naked. The tight end is responsible for the C gap, while the tailback handles the D gap. If no defender blitzes or shows up in the D gap, the back will then check himself out into the flat on an arrow route at 3 yards.

Hitch/Naked (Wheel)

Just like the Flood concept, the read progression for the quarterback is the same on the hitch conversion. What differs is the passing concept changes to a Wheel route in which a double move is added. The No. 1 outside receiver will run a curl at 12 yards and come back down to 10 yards. The No. 2 receiver, in the slot, will run a 5-yard out replicating a speed-out and then wheel up the numbers. The quarterback will read the wheel side high to low, starting with the wheel, move on to the curl and then look down to the running back in the flat. The final option is for the quarterback to pull the ball and run. (See Diagrams 3 & 4)

These are just a few examples we use in our offense to move the pocket and make the quarterback mobile. We try to make it as simple as possible for all 11 offensive players, but also feel it is complex enough to create confusion for the defense. In turn, the offense will not only produce first downs, but also explosive plays. **AFCA**

Diagram 3 - Hitch/Naked (Wheel) Vs. 2 High

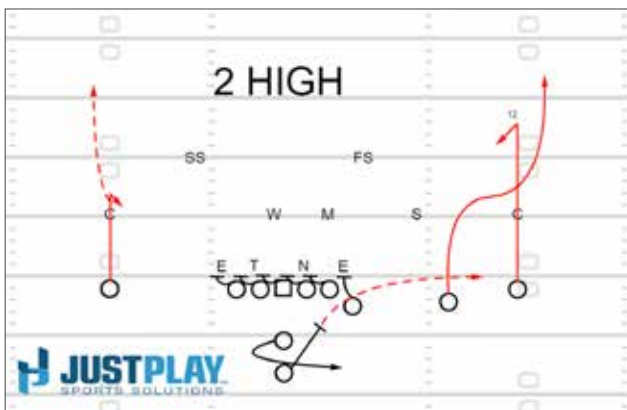
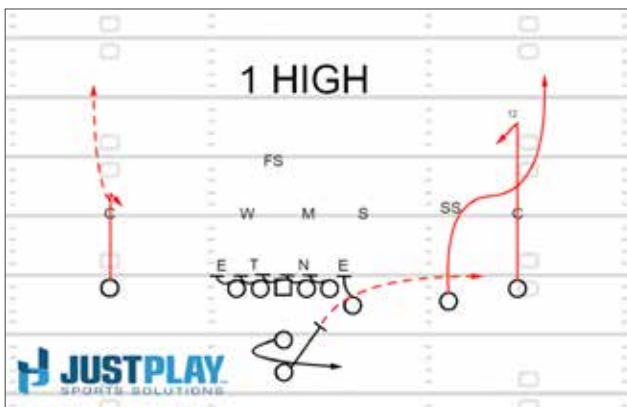


Diagram 4 - Hitch/Naked (Wheel) Vs. 1 High



Automatic Advantages

By Greg Jones, Linebackers Coach, Wake Forest

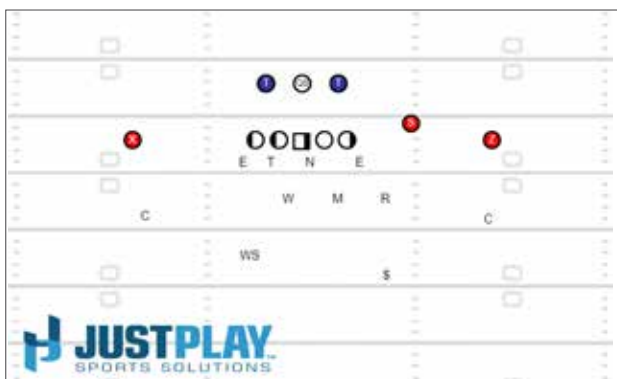
At Wake Forest, one way we try to combat the challenge of keeping things simple while remaining complex is by having a few select defensive “automatics.” Automatics are override defenses that account for a specific formation, situation or offensive backfield. If a team does not show a lot of one formation or backfield set or if your defense rarely finds itself in a given situation, having a solution to the potential schematic problem – that players can easily identify, check and be comfortable with – is paramount. Automatics allow defenses to spend the majority of the time game-planning offensive nuances that players will feel comfortable combatting in order to find success.

At the same time, automatics also allow players to confidently be in position to handle some of the exotic sets they may face because the automatics have been practiced throughout the spring and fall.

With that in mind, it is critical not to have too many automatics in your system because your defense can become too predictable. It is important to have the ability to check in and out of each automatic. For example, if an offense has two snaps of “Gun-Split” in a seven-game breakdown, you can be comfortable going into that game with an automatic for it. However, if the offense decides to major in that set during the game because of the automatic call, the defense must have a mechanism to play other schemes to switch it up. If not, the defense becomes predictable and easier for the offense to attack.

The criteria needed to implement automatics is a decision every staff will need to decide on its own, but the effectiveness the calls can have, in my opinion, is dependent on how the staff chooses to enlist them within its respective defensive structure. Carryover means everything to defensive players. Oftentimes, position coaches will use the phrase “same as.” How many “same as” defenses can you implement so that players have a strong, fundamental understanding of the concept that will allow them to play fast and aggressive, while also providing them with the best chance for success?

Diagram 1



Defining Gun-Split: What, When And Why

One automatic we use often at Wake Forest is our base Gun-Split check. First, we need to define what we consider Gun-Split. Most teams in the ACC are 11- or 12-personnel offenses. When we talk about Gun-Split, we are talking specifically about 20 pony personnel or two-tailback offenses, where both tailbacks are aligned offset in a position to receive a handoff on either side of the quarterback. (See Diagram 1)

As a staff, we must discuss if we want to automatic into our check should a team create a Gun-Split backfield set with non-20 pony personnel (wide receiver or tight end aligned in the second running back position), but most of the time, this will not trigger an automatic response. The thought process is always: What is the offense trying to accomplish by creating this set? If it is not a true two-tailback set, the play type is usually much different.

Most offenses we face that implement 20 pony personnel sets try to accomplish one of the following:

1. A quarterback-designed run game (power read)
2. Lead stretch with quarterback read in both directions
3. Counter GT in both directions
4. Five-out quick game
5. Max protection shots downfield

Our base Gun-Split check fundamentally fits into what we already do as a base defense (four down, under front, quarters team). We like our base Gun-Split check because it allows our defense to have an extra defender to account for the quarterback outside in. We will defend the run from the inside out and have a leveraged second- or third-level defender to account for any read element from the quarterback. This is our go-to answer against designed quarterback run teams.

If the quarterback is not a running threat or the offense does not incorporate any read elements, we will most likely decide to play another defense to match this set.

Diagram 2 – Zone Read or Stretch Read (Strong)



Additionally, many teams offensively look at quarters as a great way to take an individual deep shot matchup on the perimeter. Depending on what a team will do out of this set may determine whether to close the middle of the field to counter those deep shots.

If that is the case, this check will not be the best fit. However, if you play quarters in a two-by-two set, you have already identified the safety on a slot receiver as a matchup you are comfortable with. If you are prominently a quarters-base defense, this check aligns strongly with what you already do and allows a defense to get the numbers you need.

The weakness in our Gun-Split check, as I mentioned, is downfield shots on the perimeter. In the end, we often decide to stick with the check regardless of whether the offense is showing this look because it is very sound against the run, our players are comfortable executing it and there is a lot of “same as” carryover to what we are already doing in other formational sets. If you have the confidence in your secondary to play the ball downfield from an off position, there really is no disadvantage to this check. It is imperative to always understand the weaknesses and strengths of every check we implement. This allows us to have the complementary pieces in place to counter an offense’s attack after having adjusted during the flow of the game.

Defending The Zone/Lead Stretch/Run Game

The hardest part of defending a Gun-Split formation is when teams utilize quarterback-designed zone runs with a read element. That challenge is gaining the extra number advantage. The formation gives the offense the ability to redistribute post-snap in both directions. The offense will be able to see the numbers the defense shows and create the advantage in their favor.

Most offenses operate out of a two-by-two or three-by-one set via a formational distribution prior to the snap. Once a team gets into the Gun-Split formation, they can create one of those sets post-snap. Therefore, our Gun-Split check specifically accounts for this, allowing our defense to get our numbers distributed post-snap so we maintain the leverage advantage on a quarterback.

First Level: The defensive line will be in base and the ends will play what we call a pin-the-hip technique (PTH). Against any offensive tackle veer release, the defensive

line will close the space and play the C-gap (jump cut the running back to the inside part of the quarterback, spill all pulls). The interior defensive linemen will hold their leverage in their respective gaps. There will always be the freedom to incorporate some type of line movement, twist, stunt, etc. if you think it will help against the plays you are trying to defend.

Second Level: The linebackers will execute what we call a “rake fit.” For every run fit we install, there are some constant elements we must always address (definition, explanation, alignment, key, reaction).

- Definition: “Rake” = plug with the possibility of a fallback
- Explanation: Addresses post-snap redistribution both ways
- Alignment: Gap aligned, overhang defender = apex
- Key: Mesh (fallback) to line of scrimmage
- Reaction: The interior linebackers will plug their internal open gap to their side unless they see fallback

The overhang defender will leverage the ball and force any lead blocks unless he sees fallback. (See Diagram 2)

Fallback is defined as No. 3 against the zone. If No. 3 is into the mesh and the zone is weak, there is no fallback. (See Diagram 3)

For there to be fallback, the zone must be in the direction of the fallback key. If No. 3 is against the zone (split, pitch phase, etc.), the linebackers will fall back. Fallback will trigger the overhang defender to play an internal gap, causing the play-side linebacker to hit the backside gap (across the center line) and trigger the backside linebacker to fall back to become a quarterback player. (See Diagram 4)

Third Level: The safeties play their traditional quarters run designations. The safety to the two-receiver side is playing his usual support calls and off-quarter technique against the slot. The safety to the one-receiver side is playing the quarterback, alley, to post. He is reading the mesh player vs. flow away — check the quarterback, run the alley, get into the post on a pass. Flow to him — leverage the ball (pitch) or force any lead blocks.

This example of an automatic is a simple adjustment that allows us to minimize the amount of teaching we have to do during the season and enables us to defend a set that is not that prevalent with great amount of detail and confidence. **AFCM**

Diagram 3 - Zone Read or Stretch Read (Weak)

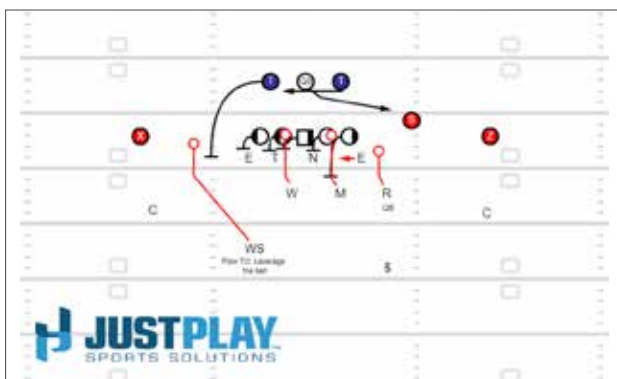
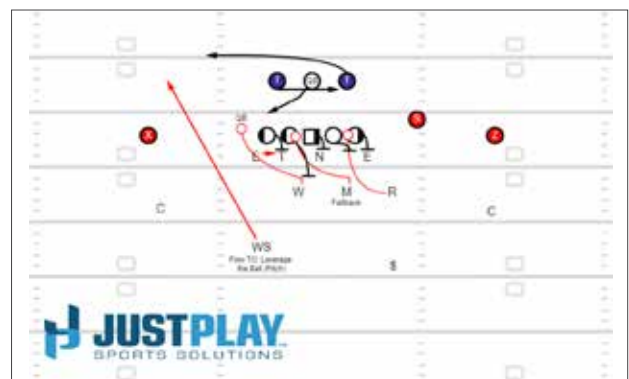


Diagram 4 - Fallback (#3 against the zone)



Missile Unit Kickoff

By Darren Jackson, Defensive Backs Coach And Community Liaison, Colorado Mesa University

The kickoff is the longest, most physically demanding play in the sport of football. It is a field-long blitz by the cover team and requires athletes to sprint at least 60 yards all while escaping blocks and attacking the opponent's return. Players must be prepared to run for 10 seconds. It is the first defensive play of the series and sets the tempo for the entire team.

The athletes who are on the kickoff team must be explosive, aggressive, physical and sure tacklers with great field vision.

The following expectations define players on the kickoff unit:

- Great get off with everyone within one yard of the ball at the kick. Be onside and have an explosive sprint.
- Run at top speed through the opponent's drop zone with early escapes. Violently escape the blocks at the first level and locate the ball inside the 30-yard line. When the ball is caught, be inside or near the opponent's 30-yard line.
- Read your indicators and identify the return. Squeeze and collapse the field while keeping leverage on the ball. Do not cover empty grass.
- Achieve vertical penetration — do not run laterally. Gain ground up field. Fill the lanes and if yours is taken, get to the next open lane. Then "Stun and Run" the second-level blocker and gang tackle the ball carrier.

Tempo to the ball and consistency are of utmost importance. Kickers need to make accurate kicks and put the ball where instructed. The goal is for the hang time to be 4.1 seconds or better. The kicker needs to count our men and make no mistakes.

The ball is live after it travels 10 yards, whether it hits an opponent or not. It is a fumble if the ball touches the return team. The receiving team can fair-catch a kick that has not touched the ground. We cannot advance a fumble. We must control the ball, stay on our feet and do not go low to take out a blocker.

The contain men must keep all 21 of the other men inside their view, be alert to tricks and never be offside. It's important to cover so hard that you force a penalty. Never follow the same color jersey; adjust to the next lane.

Kickoff Huddle

When we are preparing for a kickoff, the team will meet on the sideline, get the call from the coach, sprint onto the field and huddle. (See Diagram 1)

The kicker will tee the ball and then address the on-field huddle with the call. The huddle should face the ball with shoulders square to the line. Positions 1 through 5 will be the front line, and 6 through 10 will be the back line. The kicker will signal that he is ready to kick before he kicks the ball.

Alignments And Cover Lanes

Covering a kickoff is a full-speed sprint. When in position, each player should be in a 2-point stance, facing the kicker. We will position the team so that every player has a clear view of the kicker, the ball and the next man in front of him. As the kicker begins his approach, we will employ a waterfall-start technique so that we hit the line at full speed.

See Diagram 2 for a complete understanding of alignment and cover lane responsibilities for the Missile Unit Kickoff.

Base Alignment (Left)

- No. 1 (Fold): 2 yards from sideline
- No. 2 (Hard Contain): Split No. 1 and No. 3
- No. 3 (Cutter): Top of Numbers
- No. 4 (Hammer): Split No. 3 and No. 5
- No. 5 (Hammer): Hash
- No. 6 (Hammer): Split No. 5 and No. 7
- No. 7 (Cutter): Right Upright
- No. 8 (Field Contain): Split No. 7 and No. 9
- No. 9 (Chase Contain): Split Hash and Numbers
- No. 10 (Field Safety): Top of Numbers
- K: Ball alignment – Boundary Safety

After the ball is kicked, we will keep vertical leverage on the ball. The key element in coverage is to penetrate vertically to the ball and escape to the point of attack. We must continue to gain ground as we constrict the field to limit the options of the returner. If you lose your lane, or get knocked down, get up and fill the next closest lane. Never follow a teammate down field. Always fill the vacant alleys to the ball.

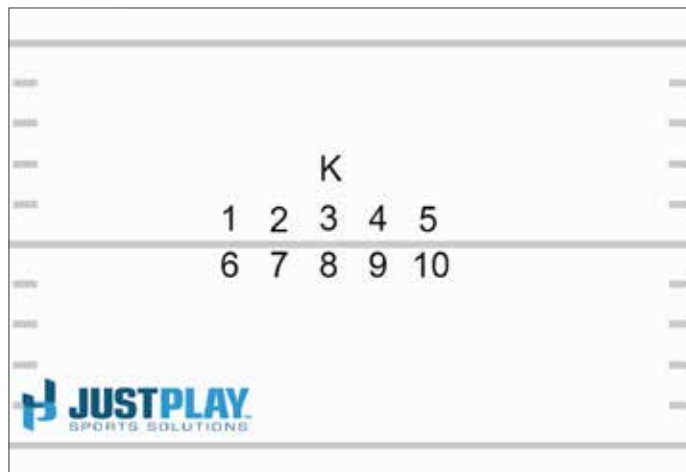
Hard Contain

No. 2 takes on the widest blocker on the second level with his inside shoulder and arm, driving him backward and eliminating any "air" between himself and the return. Make the ball go inside of your position and eliminate any outside move up field.

Spill

No. 2 takes on the widest blocker with his outside shoulder and gets up-field, making the ball bounce deep to get around him. No. 1 will contain the deep bounce. If you have a shot to make the play take it.

Diagram 1



Field Contain

No. 8 keeps 21 men inside of his view. He closes the gap by reducing the open grass between him and the edge of the return (“Trim the Fat”). He must keep everyone on his inside shoulder and make sure the ball is inside and deeper than his position. If he has a clear opening, he should make the tackle. If the ball moves up-field, he must retrace his steps and keep the ball inside.

Chase Contain

No. 9 reads and responds to No. 8. If everyone is inside of him and the ball is running away, he folds inside and works at linebacker depth, finding a lane to fill. If the ball comes toward him, he makes whatever No. 8 does right. He fills where needed as contain, inside fill, or he plays the bounce.

Fold

No. 1 reads and responds to the No. 2. If the ball is inside No. 2 after he hits the outside man, he folds behind and fills the first open lane he comes to. If the ball is stacked behind or outside the block on No. 2, he slows to fill and plays the bounce. He is a “fill linebacker.”

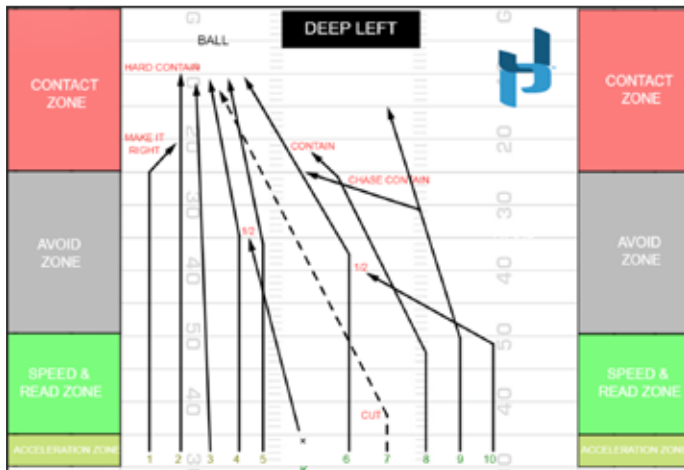
Cutter

If the return comes at No. 7, he fills his lane and keeps the ball on his inside shoulder, squeezing as he goes. He must not let the ball cross his face. If he is the first man to a wedge, he hits the first gap to his side. If he is second, he hits the outside shoulder of the first man to his side. If the ball is running away, he cuts across the field, keeping his near shoulder leverage and protecting against cutback. If he sees the ball in an open lane, he hits the hole and makes the tackle. You are the cutter and have freedom to roam and make the play.

Hammer

Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6 are the Hammer. He must fill his cover lane and maintain his shoulder leverage based on the location of the ball. He must never let a ball cross his face and use his speed to gain vertical penetration and squeeze to the ball as he gets down the field. He attacks the inner gaps in a wedge that comes toward him. He must drive late blocks into the return and be physical.

Diagram 2




Safeties

No. 10 is a field safety and keeps the ball on his inside shoulder, staying 15-18 yards behind his teammates. He must force the ball to run to the sideline and never let the ball cross his face. The Kicker is the boundary safety, and stays on top of the ball at a depth of 20-22 yards. If the ball gets outside the numbers, the kicker must keep it on his outside shoulder and force the runner out of bounds. If the ball breaks inside, the kicker keeps the ball on his inside shoulder and herds the ball to the No. 10 (field safety). For anyone playing inside and front, lane width is constantly changing and will depend upon vertical depth from the ball. Everyone must contain; no one can let the ball cross his face unless he is in a Spill.

Taking The Line

Our goal is for everyone to have one foot within 1 yard of the line as the ball is kicked. Our start should look like the finish of a 100-meter dash. Everyone must strain.

Each player’s weight should be on his front foot and the player must roll over that foot to start his sprint. He must take off at a full sprint and get his eyes up, using timing to avoid looking at the kicker once he starts. Each player picks up the flight of the ball off the tee, reinforcing depth and direction, then adjusting. Remember, being late to the line is better than being offside. 

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Move The Chains

By Mike Podoll, Associate Publisher

Celebrating 100 Years As A Football Coaching Community

It's been nearly two years since the members of the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) joined each other for an in-person AFCA Annual Convention, which last took place in January 2020 in Nashville.

With many things different in the world after this surreal two-year timespan, what hasn't changed is the fact that AFCA members are beyond excited by the prospect of reuniting with their football coaching brethren for the upcoming convention.

On top of this mounting anticipation, the upcoming 2022 event will be one to remember, as 2022 marks the 100th anniversary of the AFCA. Taking place January 9-11, 2022, in San Antonio, the 2022 AFCA Convention symbolizes the special bond connecting football coaches at all levels of competition.

The first formal meeting of national football coaches (a meeting that would later be known as the AFCA Annual Convention) was held Dec. 27, 1921, in New York City at the Hotel Astor, and the AFCA was officially established a few weeks later.

Maj. Charles D. Daly of the U.S. Military Academy is considered the founder of the AFCA. Others involved included John Heisman and Amos Alonzo Stagg, but according to an early account written by AFCA secretary-treasurer W. H. Cowell of the University of New Hampshire, it was Daly who called this fateful meeting of interested coaches in the Big Apple in 1921, to discuss the feasibility of a formal organization of football coaches.

Cowell writes: “[Daly] outlined briefly the necessity of such an organization and stated that his idea of forming such an association was twofold:”

1. (Quoting Daly): “There existed no vehicle through which the coaching fraternity as a whole could give expression to its views on the game.”
2. “To bring all coaches together with a view to mutual good fellowship and all its attendant advantages.”

While today's AFCA Convention looks very different in size and scope than those original meetings, the mission stays true to the tenets Daly established in 1921. It remains an unparalleled resource for football coaches to learn more about the game, network with other coaches and expand their coaching career possibilities, as well as examine new products and services that can help their programs.

First-time attendees to the Convention often get caught up in the energy and scale of the event. Even veteran coaches can't help but be moved by the atmosphere. Jeff Mazurchak, who's been a high school football coach in Wisconsin for over 30 years, says he was absolutely blown away when he attended his first AFCA Convention in 2020 in Nashville.

“Just the overall enormity of the event — especially when I first walked into the giant exhibit hall, it was amazing,” says Mazurchak. “The exhibit hall was huge and it was a terrific opportunity to see all the latest and greatest in terms of technology and the equipment on display from all the different vendor companies.


“I was like a hungry man walking into a grocery store as I spent hours looking around at all the great football products and services. The vendors were all so accommodating, too. Obviously, those companies are there to sell to coaches, but the cool thing is to watch them demo their products and show you how they've developed great solutions to help improve your football program. Spending quality time in the exhibit hall is an especially good way for veteran coaches to stay on top of the technology side of the game and learn about new innovations that can help your organization.”

Mazurchak adds that after his excellent experience in 2020, he wished he had come to the AFCA Convention years earlier. The veteran coach says he now encourages football coaches young and old, and at all levels of competition, especially those in high school and college, to attend the annual AFCA event as often as possible.

“I've been in the game 30-plus years as a high school coach,” says Mazurchak. “So, I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of college coaches — whether it be on recruiting visits to see some of my players, or when I'd go watch a college practice or visit a staff to learn. The bottom line is that over time, you begin to form relationships with a lot of football coaches from around the country.

“Well, having formed all these relationships over time, I was completely stunned to see so many familiar faces and old coaching friends during my time at the AFCA Convention. To reconnect with so many guys I'd gotten close to over the years and to see how they've advanced as a football coach — it was a heartwarming experience.

“My son just entered the coaching profession as a young analyst for a Division III college program and I'm insisting that he attend the 2022 AFCA Centennial Convention in San Antonio. I told him that it would change his entire perspective on being a football coach.”

Join us to celebrate 100 years of the AFCA in San Antonio, January 9-11, 2022. For more information, see page 32 in this issue or visit AFCA.com. 

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